

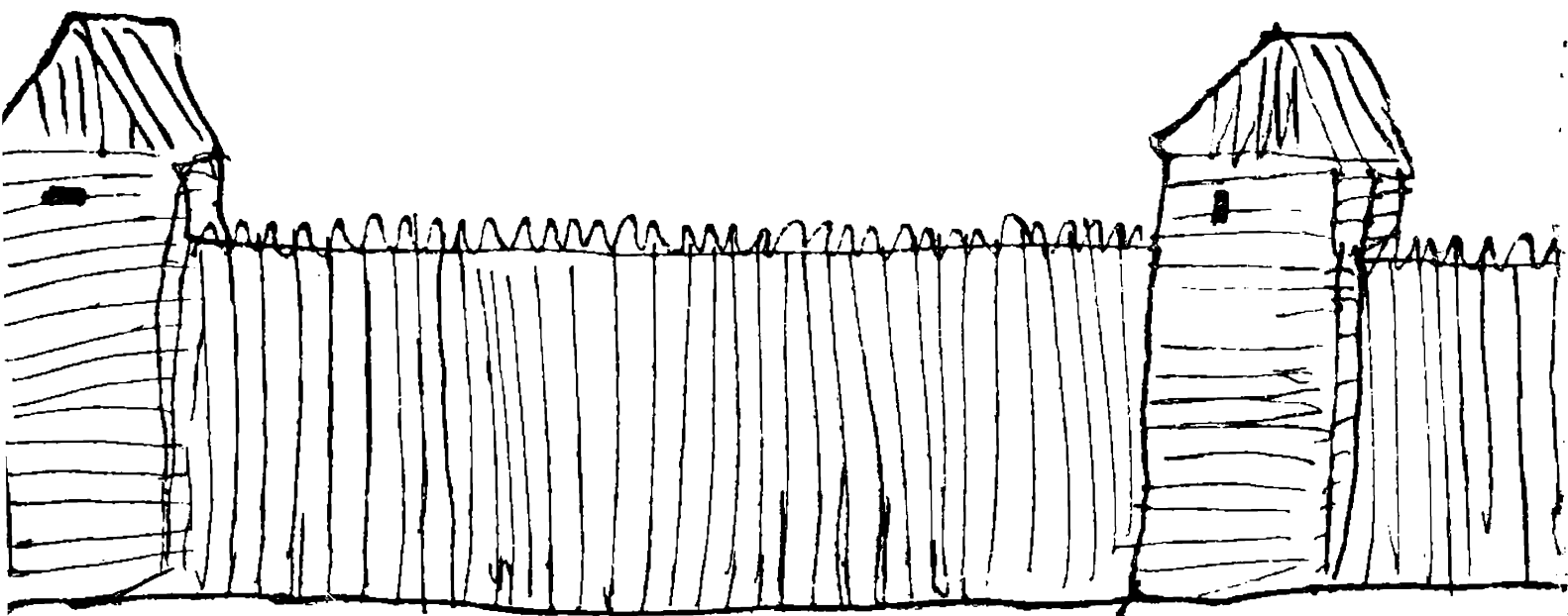


F. DOSTOYEVSKY  
NOTES  
FROM A DEAD  
HOUSE

# **CLASSICS OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE**

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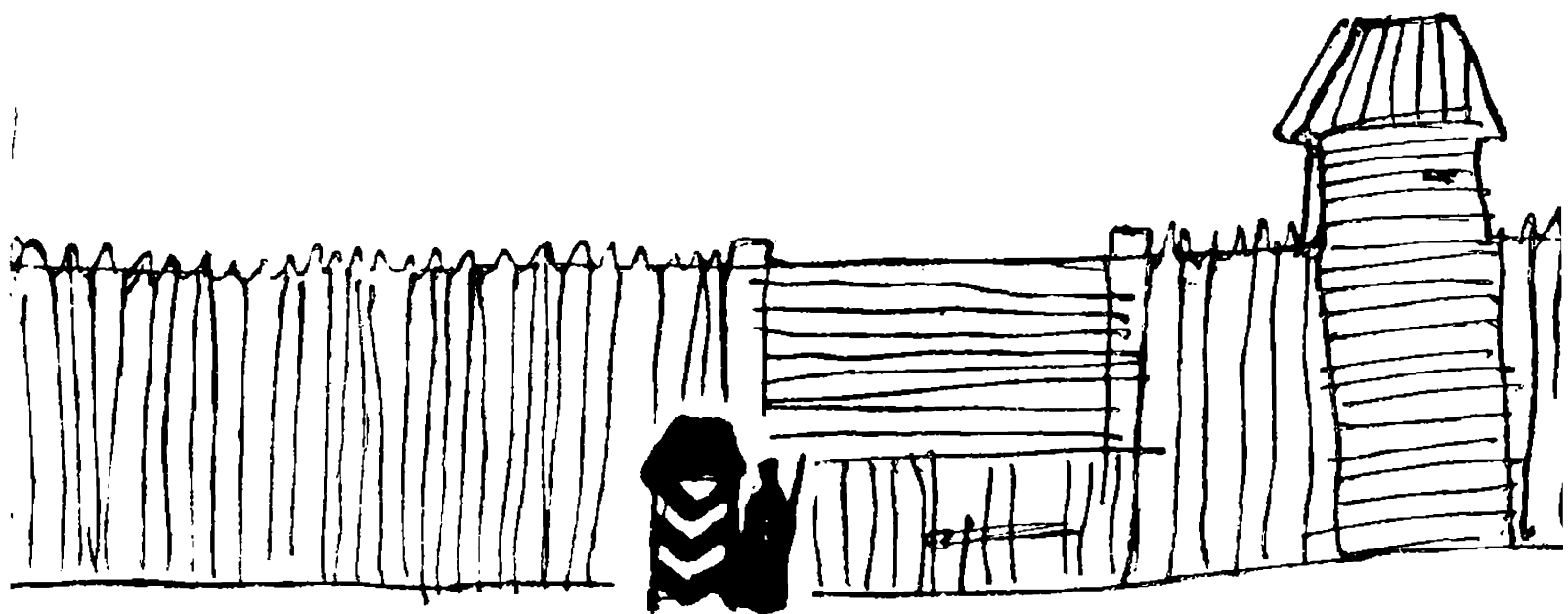
Ф . Д О С Т О Е В С К И Й  
ЗАПИСКИ  
ИЗ МЕРТВОГО  
ДОМА

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ

Москва







F . D O S T O Y E V S K Y

NOTES  
FROM A DEAD  
HOUSE

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

Moscow

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY L. NAVROZOV  
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DESIGNED BY M. KLYACHKO

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# PART ONE

## INTRODUCTION

In the remotest parts of Siberia, amid the steppes, the mountains, and the pathless forests, there are drab lonely little towns, built of wood, each with one or at most two thousand inhabitants and two churches—one in the centre and the other in the graveyard—and all of them more like fair-sized villages in the environs of Moscow rather than real towns. As a rule, they are abundantly furnished with police inspectors, assessors, and other minor officials. Siberia may be cold, but it is a warm and a cosy place for the servants of the government. The populace are simple people untouched by liberal ideas; and the rules and regulations, hallowed by time, stand firm. The officials who justly form the élite of Siberia are either sprung from the local inhabitants or arrived from Russia, chiefly from the capital, enticed by high salaries, double allowances for travelling expenses, and various seductive prospects. Those who know how to work out the riddle of life almost invariably take root in Siberia and gather an abundance of richly flavoured fruit, while others, too light-minded and unable to solve this riddle, are soon bored and regretfully wonder what folly brought them there. No sooner are their three years of statutory service up than they urgently request to be returned, afterwards deprecating and ridiculing Sibe-

ria. They are wrong, for it is a happy land from many other points of view besides that of the government officials. The climate is excellent. The merchants are rich and hospitable and many of the natives live in comfortable circumstances. The girls are like roses and their morals irreproachable. Wild game fly even in the streets, eager to be bagged by the hunters. Champagne is consumed in prodigious quantities and the caviare is astonishing. The crops in places come fifteen-fold. In short, it is a blessed land if one can only turn it to good account, something that they are very good at in Siberia.

It was in one of these gay, smug little towns whose inhabitants I liked so much that I met Alexander Petrovich Goryanchikov, once a nobleman and landlord in Russia, then a convict of the second grade condemned to ten years hard labour for the murder of his wife, and now a peaceful, unobtrusive settler in the little town of K. He had been sent to one of the adjoining districts, but lived in K. where he earned his living as a tutor. There are many like him in Siberian towns and no one is squeamish about them. They are mostly teachers of French, a subject indispensable for worldly success and one of which no one in those remote parts could have known anything but for them.

I first met Alexander Petrovich at the home of Ivan Ivanovich Gvozdikov, a venerable official, hospitable and respected. He had five very promising daughters whom Alexander Petrovich taught French four times a week at the rate of thirty kopeks in silver for each lesson. I was struck by the appearance of the man. He was very pale and thin, about thirty-five years old and rather frail. He was always very correctly dressed in the European fashion. Whenever I spoke to him, he assumed an attentive, thoughtful air, listening to every word with austere politeness as though I were posing a problem or trying to wring some secret from him. He

would answer briefly and clearly, but would weigh each word so carefully that I grew ill at ease and somehow was glad when our conversation was over. I asked Gvozdikov about him and was told that Goryanchikov was a man of irreproachable morals, or would otherwise never have been entrusted with the education of his daughters, but he was a misanthrope and shunned everybody. He was scholarly, well read, but chary of words and not easily drawn into conversation. There were some who even said that he was mad, but added that this was no serious defect, that many respectable people in town showed him every kindness and that he could even be useful: in drawing up petitions for example. It was also believed that he was well connected in Russia, though it was known that he had severed all relations the moment he was exiled, and, in a word, was his own worst enemy. Everyone knew his story: he had killed his wife in their first year of marriage out of jealousy and given himself up to justice (which had made his punishment less severe). Such crimes were always regarded rather like misfortunes deserving pity. And yet the queer fellow kept stubbornly aloof and never put in an appearance anywhere except to give his lessons.

I hardly noticed him at first, but grew gradually interested in him without knowing why. There was something enigmatic about him. It was really impossible to draw him into conversation. He did answer my questions, of course, I should even say he did it with alacrity, but somehow made me feel reluctant to ask any more. Besides, there was such weariness and suffering in his expression.

As we were walking from Gvozdikov's one fine summer evening, it suddenly occurred to me to invite him to my house for a smoke. I can hardly tell how terrified he looked. He grew confused, muttered incoherently,



then glared at me and darted off in another direction, leaving me speechless with surprise. He seemed a little afraid whenever he met me after that. Still, I was not discouraged. He had aroused my curiosity and within a month I found some pretext or other to call on him, though it was a stupid and tactless thing to do.

He was lodging with an old woman at the very edge of the town. She had a consumptive daughter who was the mother of an illegitimate child, a little girl of ten, a gay and pretty thing. When I entered, I found Alexander Petrovich teaching her to read. He was put out, as if I had caught him at some misdemeanour, and sprang up terrified, staring at me. When we sat down, he watched me narrowly, as if my every change of expression had some hidden meaning. He was mistrustful to the point of madness, I could see, and sat looking at me with hatred and all but saying: "Will you never go?"

I spoke of our little town, of the news of the day, but he only smiled wryly and said nothing. I could see that he was absolutely ignorant of all happenings in the town and in no way curious about them. I went on to talk about the country at large and its needs, but he listened without comment, his eyes fixed upon mine so strangely that I finally grew ashamed of having forced myself on him. For a moment, however, he was almost roused when I offered to lend him some books and newspapers fresh from the post. He looked at them hungrily, but instantly changed his mind, explaining that he had no time to read.

I got up to go at last and as I left the house I felt a weight fall from my shoulders. I was sorry to have troubled a man who had made it his chief concern to keep aloof of the world. But what was done was done. I had noticed that he had very few books. It could not be true, then, that he read so much. Yet, on two occasions I saw a light in his window very late at night and won-

dered what had made him sit up so late? Was he writing, and if so, what?

I happened to be away from the town for three months or so. I returned in the winter and learned that Alexander Petrovich was dead. He had died in the autumn, alone and unattended, and had never even sent for a doctor. His lodging was unoccupied and he was already forgotten. In the hope of learning what the man had been doing, had he been writing perhaps, I hastened to make the acquaintance of his landlady. For the gift of twenty kopeks, she brought me a basket filled with the papers of the deceased, confessing that she had already used two pads for household needs. She was a sullen old woman and I could get nothing from her. She could not say anything of interest about her former lodger. He had scarcely ever worked, had not opened a book or touched a pen for months, but kept walking up and down his room all night, thinking and sometimes talking to himself. He had been very fond of her little grandchild and had become especially kind to her when he learned that her name was Catherine. On St. Catherine's day he always had a requiem sung in church for someone's soul. He had detested visitors and never gone out except to give his lessons. He had even eyed his landlady in an unfriendly manner when she came to tidy his room once a week. He had scarcely spoken to her in the three years he had lodged with her.

When I asked the little girl if she remembered him, she looked at me and then turned away weeping. Someone loved him after all!

I took the papers away with me and spent the day examining them. Most of them were unimportant or merely children's exercises, but then I came upon a rather thick notebook filled with minute handwriting, but unfinished and perhaps forgotten by the author himself. It turned out to be a narrative—incoherent and frag-

mentary—of the ten years Alexander Petrovich had spent in hard labour, interrupted here and there by another story or strange, frightening recollections thrown in convulsively as though they had been written under compulsion. Reading some of the fragments again and again, I began to wonder if they had not been set down in moments of madness. Still, the memories of the convict prison—*Notes from a Dead House*, as he called them, seemed not without interest to me. Quite a new world was revealed here and I found the strangeness of his facts, together with his singular remarks on these doomed people, of absorbing interest. But perhaps I am mistaken. I shall publish some of the chapters to allow the public to judge for itself.

## I

### THE DEAD HOUSE

Our prison stood just behind the ramparts of the fortress. Looking through a chink in the stockade in the hope of seeing a bit of God's world, I would see nothing but a strip of sky and a high earthwork overgrown with tall steppe weeds, and the sentries who strode to and fro upon it night and day. And then I would realize that years would pass and I would still be peering through that chink, seeing the same earthwork and sentries and strip of sky, not the sky above the prison, but the other, free sky far, far away. The yard, two hundred feet long by one hundred and fifty wide, an irregular hexagonal, was enclosed by a high stockade. One side had a great, sturdy gate, watched by the sentries day and night, and always shut, except when the convicts were led out to work. Beyond, lay light and liberty, the life of the free people. But to us it seemed like a dream never to come true. We had our own peculiar world,

unlike anything else. Habits, customs, laws and clothes were all different in this house of living death, this world of people set apart whom I shall describe.

On entering the gate, one could see two one-storey wooden structures on each side of the vast yard. These were the barracks where the convicts were kept according to their grades. There was another house farther on, divided into two compartments and serving as a mess room. Behind it there was yet another which served at once as cellar, loft and barn. The middle of the enclosure was a barren stretch where the prisoners were drawn up in rows three times a day. The roll was called morning, noon, and evening, and often several times besides if the soldiers on guard were especially suspicious or not very bright at counting. A broad strip, too, was left between the stockade and buildings on all sides, where prisoners of a sombre turn of mind liked to stroll when not at work, thinking their own thoughts in comparative seclusion.

I liked to watch their grim, branded faces whenever I met them and try to guess what they were thinking of. The favourite occupation of one, in his brief periods of leisure, was to count the stakes in the stockade. There were fifteen hundred or so and he had counted them all and knew each by heart. Every one of them represented a day of confinement. Counting one off every day, he could get a vivid idea of how many days he had yet to serve. He would be genuinely happy when finished with one side of the hexagon; yet many more years were left for him to count. One learns to be patient in prison. I saw a prisoner one day who had served his term and was taking leave of his comrades. He had done twenty years of hard labour. There were convicts there who could remember him when he arrived, young and carefree, troubled neither by his crime nor his punishment. But now he was an old man with grey

hair and a face sad and morose. He walked through our six barracks in silence, prayed before the holy image when he entered each of them, and bowed low before his former comrades, begging them to bear him no ill-will.

I also remember how one of the convicts, formerly a well-to-do Siberian peasant, was called to the gate one evening. Six months before, he had learned that his wife had remarried and he had been brooding on it ever since. And now she had come to the prison and asked for him. She had brought something for him. They talked for a few minutes, wept together and then parted never to meet again. I saw his expression when he came back to the barrack. Yes, one learns to be patient in prison.

When darkness fell, we had to re-enter our barracks to be shut up for the night. I always found it painful to leave the yard for the long, low room dimly lighted by tallow candles and charged with oppressive odours. I can hardly understand how I could have lived there for ten years. My bed was three planks on the bunk shelf; that was all the privacy I had. More than thirty were crowded together on this shelf. We were shut in early in the winter time and there was at least four hours to go before all were asleep. Until then there was a noise, uproar, laughter, oaths, rattling of chains, a poisonous vapour of thick smoke, a confusion of shaven heads, branded foreheads, and ragged clothes, the fallen and the accursed.... Yes, a man is hard to die. He is a being who can get used to anything. And that, probably, is the best definition of him.

There were some two hundred and fifty of us in this prison and the figure hardly ever changed. New men arrived, while others were released having served their terms, or died. There were all sorts of men among them, from all parts of Russia I think. There were all nation-

alities, even several men from the mountains of the Caucasus.

They were segregated according to crimes and sentences and I am sure that every crime was fairly represented. The bulk of the inmates was composed of those exiled and condemned in the civil class or "strongly condemned" as the prisoners used to say in their simplicity.\* They had been stripped of all civil rights, were outcasts for ever with faces branded to testify to their damnation for all time. Their terms varied from eight to twelve years, after which they were sent to outlying Siberian areas as settlers.

There were also convicts in the military class, who were not deprived of all civil rights—as is usually the case in the Russian penal battalions—and were sentenced to relatively short terms. When finished with these, they had to return to service in the army of the Siberian frontier. Many of them would soon find themselves back in prison for fresh offences, this time not with a short sentence, but with a twenty-year term at least. This category were known as the perpetuals. Yet even they were not deprived of all rights for ever. Finally, there was a special group, fairly numerous—mostly from the army: they were called the special section and were made up of the worst malefactors from all parts of Russia. Even they themselves were sure that they had been imprisoned for life and had no idea of the length of their terms. The law demanded that they be given double and treble tasks, and they were only kept here temporarily until prisons with especially hard labour tasks were opened in Siberia. "You're only here for a stretch," they would say, "but we shall go all the ways of hard labour."

I have since heard that this section has been abolished.

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\* *Ssylno* (exile) in Russian sounds much like *silno* (strongly).—*Tr.*

Nor is there a civil section any more, but only the general penal battalion. The officers in charge have undoubtedly been changed too and so what I am describing are the customs and practices of old.

Yes, it was a long time ago. Sometimes I think it was all a dream. I remember entering the convict prison as dusk was falling one December evening. The convicts were returning from work and the roll-call was about to begin. A moustached sergeant at last opened the gate of this strange house where I was to stay for so many years and experience more than I could have had even an approximate notion of if I had not actually endured it. Could I have ever imagined the poignant suffering of never being alone even for a single minute in all those ten years—always under guard when at work and always with two hundred companions when in the barrack, and never once alone. But I had to get used to more things besides.

There were both murderers on impulse and murderers by profession among us, robbers and the chieftains of robbers, petty thieves and past masters of begging and pilfering. There were also those who made you wonder what could have brought them there. Still, each of them had his own story, as hazy and depressing as the morning after a debauch. They spoke very little of their past, as a rule, and seemed to be trying to forget it. There were murderers here who seemed so gay and carefree that one could be sure their conscience never troubled them. But there were others who were sombre and almost always silent. Whatever they were like, they rarely spoke of the past, and curiosity was neither customary nor welcome. But if, by some rare chance, somebody did begin to talk, for want of anything to do, his hearer would listen with gloomy indifference. Nothing could astonish anyone. "We're not so ignorant," they would say with a certain smugness. I recall how a

convict who had got drunk—it was possible to get drunk from time to time—told how he had stabbed a child of five to death, having first enticed him into a barn with a toy. The entire barrack had been laughing at his jokes, but now cried out as one man to silence him. And it was not because of indignation that they stopped him, but because *this* was something *one should not talk about*. One was not supposed to talk of such things.

Incidentally, it was true that they were not ignorant. Half of them could read and write; and where in Russia can one find a group of two hundred and fifty men half of whom could read and write? I have since heard a conclusion made on the strength of this that education tends to demoralize the common people. This is wrong since the cause lies elsewhere. It must be admitted that education tends to develop self-confidence, but this is far from being a fault.

Each section wore different clothes. Some wore shirts half brown and half grey and the same sort of trousers—one leg brown and the other grey. When we were at work one day, a little girl who sold buns to the convicts stood looking at me for a long time and then burst into laughter: “Oh, how ugly!” she cried. “There wasn’t enough grey cloth and there wasn’t enough brown!” Others wore shirts that were grey, but for the sleeves which were brown. The heads too were shaved in different ways. A strip was shaved from the nape to the forehead or from one ear to the other.

This curious clan had a vivid family likeness. Even the most striking and colourful personalities, dominating the others, could not help falling in with the general tone. It must be remarked that all the convicts—with the exception of a few unquenchably cheerful souls who for that reason were held in general contempt—were morose, envious, frightfully vain, boastful, oversensitive, and excessively pedantic. The first and indis-



pensable virtue was to show surprise at nothing. That, indeed, was every man's mania—to bear himself with dignity. But often, the most arrogant air suddenly gave way to cringing humility. There were some really strong-willed men, who were always natural and never affected airs. Curiously enough, some of these really strong people were morbidly vain. Vanity and appearances were in the foreground in general. The majority had grown depraved and meanly servile. There was no end to gossip and backbiting: our lives were a perpetual damnation. Yet no one dared to raise a voice against the established customs and traditions. All submitted. Some of the stronger characters submitted with difficulty, but did so just the same. Prisoners who had burst all bounds and broken through every restraint when at liberty, whose crimes seemed to have been committed in a mad fever, in a kind of delirium, for no visible reason but simply out of over-excited vanity, were promptly put in place, though some of them had been the terror of entire villages and towns. The new man looked round and saw that there was no one he could astonish here, that he had come to the wrong place for that. Gradually, he submitted and adopted the general tone which showed itself in a peculiar pride with which almost every convict bore himself as if the very denomination of "convict" were an exalted rank, a title of honour. There was no trace of shame or remorse. There was only an air of submission, a kind of perfunctory, placid resignation. "We are lost," they would say. "We were not able to live properly in freedom and must now walk the Green Street."\* "You did not obey your father and mother and so now you must obey the drummer." "You did not want your clothes gold-sewn, so now you must break stone!" These maxims were endlessly repeated, but never taken

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\* *To walk the Green Street*—to run the gauntlet.—*Tr.*

seriously. They were just words. There was hardly a man among them who admitted his crime to himself. Let a stranger try to reproach a convict for his crime (but then it is not in keeping with the Russian character to reproach a criminal) and there would be no end to invectives. And how ingenious the convicts were in their swearing. It was a thing developed to a fine art, exalted almost to a science. The insult lay not in the word so much as in the tone and implication, making it far more venomous and painful. The art thrived on their endless quarrels. All these people worked under compulsion, and all were, consequently, idle and growing depraved. Those who were not depraved when they arrived became so in prison. Thrown together against their will, they were hostile to one another.

"The devil wore out three pairs of shoes getting us all together," they would say; and gossip, intrigues, petty backbiting, envy, hatred, and malice, therefore, stood out above everything in this dismal life. No old woman could be as spiteful and petty as some of these murderers. There were, I repeat, some sterner characters who were resolute, intrepid and self-controlled. These gained involuntary esteem. Though often vain of their prestige, they tried not to oppress the others with it, shunned quarrels, bore themselves with dignity, were reasonable and almost always obedient to the authorities not out of a sense of duty, but as though by some mutual agreement the advantages of which were plain to both sides.

The officials, for their part, dealt with them prudently. I remember the occasion when one of these resolute and fearless prisoners, known to the authorities for his ferocity, was summoned to be whipped for some offence or other. It was summer, no work was being done, and the staff officer in charge of the convict prison appeared in the guardroom near the gate to supervise the punish-

ment in person. This major seemed the devil incarnate to the prisoners who trembled at the very sight of him. Strict to the point of madness, he hurled himself on people, as the convicts would say. It was above all his look, as sharp as a lynx's, that saw right through them. He saw all without looking. When entering the gate he knew what was happening even at the farthest corner. Eight-Eyes was the nickname that the convicts gave him. His methods were wrong, of course, for his frenzied onslaughts merely increased the bitterness of embittered men. If it had not been for his chief, the commandant, a well-bred and reasonable man who tempered his savagery, his rule would have brought disaster. I cannot understand how he managed to retire safe and sound, though he was brought to trial, it's true.

The prisoner turned pale when his name was called. As a rule he received the blows in silence and then got up briskly, regarding the occurrence with the equanimity of a philosopher. The authorities, for their part, handled him with care. This time, however, he had thought himself to be in the right for some reason or other and had managed to thrust a sharp shoemaker's knife in his sleeve. Sharp instruments were strictly forbidden. Searches were frequent, unexpected, and thorough. The consequences were severe, but since it was difficult to discover anything hidden by a thief and since one could not do without knives and tools in prison, they were never lacking in spite of the searches. Whenever they were taken away, they were soon replaced.

The whole convict prison rushed to the stockade, and the men stood peering anxiously through the chinks. Everyone was sure that Petrov would not permit himself to be flogged this time and that the major's end had come. At the decisive moment, however, the major got into his carriage and drove off, leaving a subaltern to carry out the chastisement. "God has saved him," said

the convicts afterwards. As for Petrov, he underwent his punishment quietly: his anger had gone with the major's departure. The prisoner is submissive up to a certain point, but there is a limit which must not be crossed. And nothing is stranger than these outbursts of rebellion when it is crossed. A man may suffer humbly for years and endure the severest punishments, but will suddenly explode over some trifle, over something that does not matter at all. He may be called a madman in a way and that is what he often is called.

I have already said that in all the years I saw no signs of remorse in these people or of brooding over crimes committed and that most of the convicts secretly believed themselves to have done nothing wrong. Vanity, evil examples, bravado, and false pride were much responsible for this. On the other hand, who can claim to have sounded the depths of these lost souls and to have read their secret story? Still, it would seem that in all those years I should have been able to notice some trace, be it ever so fleeting, of inner anguish or moral suffering. But I saw nothing of the sort, nothing at all. Yes, it seems that crime cannot be judged from a ready-made point of view and that its philosophy is subtler than is generally thought. Prison and hard labour do not reform the criminal, of course, but only serve to punish him and to safeguard society. Imprisonment and severest hard labour evoke only hatred, a thirst for forbidden pleasures, and frightful thoughtlessness. But, on the other hand, I am also sure that the famous solitary confinement system brings merely deceptive and illusory results. It saps a man's life, wears down his spirit, enfeebling and browbeating him, and at last presents a shrivelled and half-demented mummy, as a model of repentance and reform.

The criminal who has trespassed against society cannot help but hate society and consider it wrong and him-

self right. He has undergone punishment, moreover, which in his eyes absolved him and squared the account. One may even go so far as to exculpate the criminal altogether. But whatever the point of view, everyone will agree that there are certain crimes that have been regarded as such from the beginning of the world under every law, and will continue to be so regarded as long as man is man. It was only in prison that I heard of deeds gruesome and unnatural, of monstrous murders told with a candid, almost childlike gaiety. I shall never forget a certain parricide. He had been something like a prodigal son to his sixty-year-old father, a gentleman. He had been in the civil service, but he led a dissipated life and ran heavily into debt; it had been in vain that his father had remonstrated with him. Suspecting his father of having a large sum of money besides a house and farm in the country, he had murdered the old man to come into the legacy. The crime was not discovered until a month afterwards. Meanwhile, the murderer, who had informed the police of his father's disappearance, had continued his debauches. At last, in his absence, the police found the body in his yard in a sewer covered with boards. The corpse had been neatly dressed and the grey head which had been completely severed had been put back, resting on a pillow. The young man did not confess at the trial. He was stripped of his rank and nobiliary privileges and sentenced to twenty years hard labour. As long as I knew him, I always found him in the best and the gayest of spirits. He was the most light-minded, capricious, and reckless young man, though far from being a fool. I never noticed any cruelty in him. The convicts despised him not for his crime which was never mentioned, but for his folly and lack of dignity. He sometimes spoke of his father: "Take *my old man*, for instance, he was never ill to his dying day," he said one day boasting of the hereditary health of his family. Such

callousness in a man was inconceivable of course. It was not an ordinary crime, there was something freakish there, a defect of the constitution perhaps, some physical or moral monstrosity yet unknown to science. I could not believe that he had committed it, but the people of his town told me all about it and the details left no room for doubt.

The convicts once heard him cry out in his sleep: "Hold him down! Cut off his head, his head, his head!"

Most of the convicts talked in their sleep: oaths, thieves' jargon, knives and axes came to their tongues more often than anything else.

"We've been beaten too sorely!" they would say. "Our innards have been hurt and that's why we shout in our sleep at night."

Regulation labour was a duty rather than an occupation: the prisoner finished his allotted task at the appointed hours and returned to the barracks. The work was regarded with hatred. Without some absorbing occupation of his own in which he could use his wits, a man would never survive imprisonment at all. And what else could make these energetic people who had lived hard and who lusted for life, but had been herded together against their will and forcibly torn from society and normal existence—what else could make them try to live in a normal, natural manner? Idleness alone would have developed such criminal instincts as they had never known before. Man cannot live without work and without his own lawful possessions. Without these, he must grow depraved and turn into a beast. Every convict, therefore, plied a trade or some hobby, driven by natural need and some instinct of self-preservation. The long days of summer were taken up almost entirely with regulation hard labour and the nights were so short there was barely enough sleep. In the winter, however, the convicts were shut in as soon as it grew dark. What

were they to do with those long, dreary evenings? And so each barrack turned into a large workshop in spite of the rules. It was not work as such that was forbidden, however, it was the tools; and what work was possible without them? Work had to be done in secret, therefore, and the authorities, for their part, did not keep too close a watch. Many of the new-comers had never known a trade, but soon learned from their comrades and left prison as excellent workmen.

We had cobblers, shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, locksmiths, engravers, and gilders. We even had a jeweller, a Jew named Isaiah Bumstein, who was also a money-lender. Every man laboured to earn an honest kopek getting orders from the town. Money is minted freedom, and its value is tenfold in the eyes of a man deprived of freedom. When the coins jingle in his pocket he is almost consoled even if he cannot spend them. But money can always be spent and forbidden fruit is doubly sweet. Even vodka could be had in prison. Pipes were strictly forbidden, yet everybody smoked one. Money and tobacco preserved the convicts from scurvy as work preserved them from crime. Without work they would have destroyed one another like spiders in a jar.

Work and money, nevertheless, were both forbidden. There would be sudden raids at night and everything be taken away. No matter how carefully the money was concealed, it sometimes fell into the searchers' hands. And that, partly, was why it was never saved, and went in drink at once. After every search the delinquent was not only deprived of his property, but severely punished as well. Still, the confiscated articles were quickly replaced and everything went on as of old. The administration was well aware of this, and the convicts took their punishment for granted though this was like living on a volcano.

Those who were unskilled sought to make money in other ways, often quite original. Some of them bought and sold things, often such things that no one but a convict would think of buying or selling, or even regarding as of any value whatever. The convict prison was very poor, but extremely enterprising. The meanest rag was of value and could be turned to good account. As for money, it had quite another rate of exchange than in the free world. A few kopeks only were paid for long and painful tasks.

Some did well as money-lenders. The prisoner who had spent his money in drink or some speculation brought his last belongings to the pawnbroker and pledged them for several coppers at a fabulous interest. If he failed to redeem them, they were sold pitilessly and without delay. Usury flourished so well that money was lent even on things that belonged to the prison: linen, boots, and so on—things that might be needed at any moment. When the lender accepted such pledges, the deal sometimes took a different turn, not altogether unexpected, however. After receiving the money for the pledge, the client without much ado would go straight to the sergeant in charge and report the whole thing, with the result that the usurer would be compelled to relinquish everything. The sergeant would attend to this without the formality of reporting to his superiors. Curiously enough, a quarrel did not necessarily follow. The money-lender surrendered the things demanded with a morose air as though he had expected this to happen all along. It is just possible that he realized that he would have done the same in the place of his client. If he let fly with a string of oaths afterwards, it was done not out of anger, but as a mere formality.

The convicts stole from one another without shame. Each had a little box fitted with a padlock for his regulation things. This was allowed, but did not always help. They were expert thieves here. A convict who was sin-



cerely devoted to me—I say it without exaggeration—stole my bible, the only book allowed. He confessed to it the same day not because he repented, but because he was sorry for me when he saw that I was looking for it everywhere.

There were several convicts whom we called “tapsters” because they smuggled and sold spirits making good money out of it. I shall return to them further on, for the liquor traffic deserves special mention. Many of the prisoners had been sentenced for smuggling. No wonder, therefore, that spirits were smuggled in despite the sharp watch. Smuggling, I must say, is a peculiar crime. Strange as it may seem, the prospect of gain is only of secondary consideration to the smuggler. He follows his calling out of passion, like a poet. He risks everything, exposes himself to the worst dangers, is ever scheming or getting out of scrapes. At times, he works as one inspired. His passion is as irresistible as that of a gambler. I used to know a prisoner, an enormous, burly man, yet so mild, good-natured, and peaceful that one could not understand how he ever came to be in prison. He was so gentle and docile that he never quarrelled with anyone. Born in a western border region of Russia, he had been sentenced to hard labour for smuggling and could not, of course, resist the temptation to smuggle spirits here. He was punished for it so many times; and heaven knows how he feared the rods! His precarious trade, moreover, brought him the most trifling reward. It was the dealer behind him who made the money, but this queer fellow was fond of his art for art’s sake. He wept like a woman after chastisement and swore by all that was holy that he would never do it again; he would manfully resist temptation for a month, but end with succumbing to the old excitement. It was thanks to such as he that spirits were always to be had.

Another source of income which did not exactly en-

rich the prisoners, but was steady and beneficial, was alms. The upper classes of our society have no idea to what extent our merchants, townsmen, and peasants pity the "unfortunates." Charity was always given—loaves of bread, buns and rolls, and more rarely money. Without charity, the life of the convicts and especially of the accused awaiting trial, who were kept in more rigorous conditions, would be very hard indeed. The gifts were shared between the convicts with pious scruple. If there was not enough to go round, the loaves were divided, sometimes into as many as six parts so that each should have his share. I remember the first time I was given money. A short time after my arrival, as I was returning from work one morning escorted by a soldier, I met a woman with a little girl, a child of ten as beautiful as an angel. I had seen them once before. The mother was the widow of a young soldier who had died in the infirmary of the convict prison where I lay ill at the time. His wife and daughter had come to take their last leave of him and wept bitterly.

The little girl blushed when she saw me now and whispered something to her mother. The woman stopped, drew a half-kopek from a bundle and gave it to the little girl who ran after me.

"Here, poor man! Take this in the name of Christ!" she chirped skipping ahead of me and slipping the coin into my hand. I took it and the little girl returned happily to her mother. I kept that half-kopek for a long time.

## II

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The first weeks and indeed the early part of my imprisonment will ever stand out in my memory. The years that followed are less distinct. Some memories have

faded and blurred, leaving a general impression of something painful, monotonous and stifling.

But all that I went through at first is as fresh in my memory as if it happened yesterday. That is but natural, I suppose.

The first thing that struck me was that this life presented nothing that was at all striking, nothing extraordinary or even unexpected. The life I found here seemed to have loomed in my imagination before when, trudging into Siberia, I had tried to picture what my lot would be like; but soon a host of monstrous and unbelievable impressions were thrust upon me, and it was not until much later, when I had been in prison for a long time, that I fully realized how exceptional and inconceivable this existence was. I was astonished more and more and must admit that this astonishment remained with me throughout the term. I could never grow reconciled.

My first impression was one of general and extreme disgust, but oddly enough it seemed to me that life here would not be as hard as I had imagined. Though hampered by their chains, the convicts strolled about the yard freely, swearing and singing, did their own work, smoked pipes, and even drank vodka (though not many could afford that), while at night, there were some who played cards. The work did not seem very heavy, and it was not until long afterwards that I understood that it was *hard labour* not because it was hard and unending, but because it was *compulsory* and unavoidable. The peasant works harder and longer—at times far into the night in summer, but he works for himself, for a sensible purpose, and suffers far less than the convict who does a compulsory task that is utterly useless to him. It once occurred to me that if it were desired to crush a man completely, to punish him so severely that even the most hardened murderer would quail, it would only be

needed to make his work absolutely pointless and absurd. Hard labour may present no interest to the convict, but it makes sense in itself: the convicts make bricks, dig the earth, plaster the walls or build houses, and each of these occupations has a meaning and an end. The prisoner is actually keen on his work sometimes and tries to do it more neatly, quickly, and skillfully. But compel him to pour water from barrel to barrel or to grind sand or to shift a heap of earth to and fro and he is sure to hang himself or commit a host of crimes in a few days. Anything rather than live, anything to escape from this agony and humiliation! Such punishment, needless to say, would be torture and revenge rather than correction and would defeat its own purpose. Yet all compulsory labour contains a grain of this agonizing vacuity and humiliation and that is why hard labour is by far more agonizing than voluntary work could ever be.

Besides, I did not arrive until December, and had no idea about the work in the summer, which was at least five times as tiring. There was little regulation work to be done in the winter. The prisoners went to break up some old boats on the Irtysh, worked in the shops, shovelled the snow-drifts away from the public buildings, and calcined and pounded gypsum. As the days were short, the work ended early and the convicts returned to the barracks where there would have been nothing to do if not for their own work. But scarcely a third of them had their own occupations, while the others lounged about, quarrelling, scheming, drinking if they had money, and gambling away the last stitch of clothing at night sheerly out of idleness, weariness, and boredom.

Later on, I came to realize that there was yet another torment in addition to confinement and compulsory labour, perhaps the sharpest of all. It was *forced co-existence*. To some degree, coexistence is forced upon us

everywhere, but the fact is that those who come to prison are not the sort one would like to associate with, and I am certain that every convict suffered from this, though mostly unconsciously.

The food seemed passable. The convicts assured me that it was better than in European Russia. How true this was I cannot say, as I was never there. Many of us, besides, were able to buy food outside. A pound of beef cost half a kopek in the winter and three kopeks in the summer. But such luxury could be afforded only by those who had a constant supply of money, while most of the convicts had to content themselves with the prison rations. I noticed, too, that when the convicts praised the food it was the bread they meant. They were thankful that it was issued in bulk and not weighed out to each. The mere prospect of it horrified them, for at least a third would have always gone hungry. As things were, the convicts distributed the bread fairly among themselves. Our bread tasted especially good and indeed was known for this in town, its fine quality being attributed to the admirable construction of our ovens. The cabbage soup, on the other hand, was very poor. It was cooked in one large cauldron and thickened with groats and was very watery on week days. I was revolted by the cockroaches in it to which the prisoners paid no attention at all.

I did not have to go to work for three days after my arrival as every new-comer was given a three days' rest. On the second day, I had to be let out of the convict prison to have my irons changed. My fetters were not of the regulation kind but the "small jingle" kind, as they were called, and worn over the trouser bottoms. The regulation fetters were made not of rings, but of four short rods, finger thick, fastened together by three links, and were worn under the trouser bottoms so as not to interfere with a man's work. The central

link was held in place by a leather strap which was attached to the shirt belt.

I remember my first morning. The drum was sounded in the guardroom near the gate and ten minutes later the sergeant on duty opened the barracks. Shivering with the cold, the convicts got up from their planks by the light of a tallow candle. Most of them were silent and morose after their sleep, yawning, stretching, and wrinkling their branded foreheads. Some crossed themselves while others were already quarrelling. The stuffiness was unbearable. The cold air rushed in as soon as the door was opened and the steam tumbled over the floor. The convicts queued up around the pails of water, reached for the dipper by turn, filled their mouths and washed, squirting the water into their hands. The pails were brought in in the evening by a prisoner elected by the barrack to do the cleaning. He did not go to work with the others, but had to sweep and scrub the floors and the boards of the bunk shelves, to remove the latrine pails and fetch water in two barrels, one for washing in the morning and the other for drinking during the day.

Quarrels flared up at once because there was only one dipper.

• "Stop pushing, a plague on you!" grumbled a tall, lean, and dusky prisoner with a gloomy face and curious bumps on his shaven skull. He jostled another prisoner, a thickset man with a lively, ruddy face. "Can't you wait?"

"What are you yelling about? Waiting costs money here! Wait yourself if you like! Look at 'im standing there like a monument! There's no forticultipation in him at all, not a bit of it!"

The word had its effect and many laughed, which was just what the fat little man was aiming at. He was a kind of voluntary clown. The tall man stood regarding him with the deepest scorn.

"Fat swine!" he muttered to himself. "Just see how the prison bread has fattened him. He'll bring us a litter by the end of Lent!"

The stout man grew angry at last.

"What sort of a bird are you, anyway?" he shouted suddenly, growing very red.

"That's what I am, a bird!"

"What bird?"

"That bird!"

"What do you mean, 'that bird'?"

"Find out for yourself!"

"No, you tell me!"

They stood glaring at each other, the fat man waiting for the answer with clenched fists as if ready for a fight. I watched them tensely. For a moment I thought they really would fight. Later, I realized that such quarrels were quite innocent and were merely played for the entertainment of the others. They rarely came to blows, and the present scene was characteristic.

The tall convict towered over the little one, feeling that all eyes were upon him. Now everything depended on his answer. He had to find some way of showing that he really was a bird of a sort. Casting a slanting look of utter contempt at his adversary, over his shoulder for greater effect as if he were regarding an insect far below, he said slowly and distinctly: "A gaol-bird, of course!"

His resourcefulness was rewarded with an outburst of laughter.

"You're a scoundrel and not a gaol-bird!" the fat man roared in a frenzy, feeling that he had been worsted on all points.

But as soon as the quarrel grew serious, the general attitude changed.

"What are you yelling for?" someone shouted. "You'd better fight and not just stand there gabbing!"

"Not them! We're full of spunk as long as we're seven to one!"

"They're a fine lot anyway! One came here for having sneaked a pound of bread and the other got a whipping because he stole some milk in the market."

"Hey, stop it, you!" called the disabled old soldier who was assigned to the barrack to keep order there and who therefore had a cot of his own in a corner.

"Look out, friends! Invalid Petrovich has woken up! Good morning to Invalid Petrovich, our dear brother!"

"Brother? Not to the likes of you! We've never even had a drink together," the invalid grumbled as he drew on his greatcoat.

Day was breaking and the roll-call would come soon. The mess barrack was crammed with men. It was impossible to push through. The convicts in their sheepskins and two-coloured caps crowded about the bread which was being sliced by a cook. Two cooks were elected for every kitchen, but they were only trusted with one knife for cutting all the bread and meat.

The prisoners sat round the tables in groups or stood in the corners in their caps and coats, ready for work. Some of them crumbled bread into their wooden bowls of kvass and spooned it up. The noise was deafening; a few of the men were talking quietly in the corners.

"A jolly good morning to Old Antonich!" said a young prisoner taking a seat beside a toothless convict.

"Good morning, if you mean it," the other said without raising his eyes, trying to munch the bread with his toothless gums.

"D'you know, Antonich, I thought you had died, honestly."

"You die first, I'll wait!"

I sat down beside them. Two convicts were talking sedately on my right, evidently trying to impress each other with their dignity.



"They won't steal from me, no fear!" said one. "Come to think of it I can do a bit of pinching myself."

"They'd better keep their hands off me too if they know what's good for them."

"Not likely! You're only a *varnak*.\* Yes, that's all we are, just *varnaks*. She'll fleece you too and think nothing of it. My kopeks have gone the same way. She came the other day, but where could we go? I asked Fedka the Hangman to let us in. He has a house in the suburbs, the one he bought from Solomon, that scurvy Jew who hung himself."

"I know. He was selling liquor two years ago and was called Grishka the Black Dive. Of course I know him."

"You don't! It was the other fellow who was called Black Dive."

"What do you mean, the other? You think you know so much! I'll show you a lot of people who knew him."

"You will, will you? Who are you anyway?"

"Don't stick your tail up like that. I've given you a thrashing and never bragged about it."

"You gave me a thrashing? The man who will is not yet born and the man who did is gone and buried."

"The plague of Benderi\*\* on you!"

"The Siberian anthrax on you!"

"May the Turkish sabres shave off your head!"

And the hailstorm of insults began.

"Hey, you! Shut up!" the others called. "Freedom wasn't good enough for them, they've gone stark mad now from the white bread they get here."

This subdued them at once. Tongue lashings were permitted and provided entertainment for the others, but blows were not tolerated except on rare occasions. If

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\* Derogatory for a convict.—*Tr.*

\*\* Benderi—a town in Bessarabia, suffered from plague in early nineteenth century.—*Ed.*

there had been a fight, it would have been reported to the major at once. He was sure to come in person and that would have meant no end of trouble. The antagonists, indeed, abused each other merely for amusement and rhetorical exercise. Sometimes they would pretend to work themselves into a frenzy, you would think that they were ready to fly at each other, but nothing of the sort ever happened, and as soon as their quarrel reached a certain point, they would peaceably part company. This seemed very queer at first. I could not imagine how one could wrangle for pleasure and amusement as they often did like in the typical scene I have just described. But vanity must not be forgotten. A swearing dialectician was held in esteem and all but applauded like an actor.

I had already sensed hostility towards me on the evening before. I caught several resentful glances. Some convicts, on the other hand, hung around me, suspecting that I had money. They became over-obliging, showing me how to wear my new fetters and helping me to get a padlocked box—for my money of course—to keep the things which had been issued me as well as some linen of my own. On the next day they stole box and all and sold it for drink. One of them eventually grew very devoted to me, but never stopped stealing from me whenever he could. He did it placidly, unemotionally, as if it were his duty; and it was impossible to be angry.

Among other things, they taught me to brew my own tea, advised me to get a tea-kettle and for the time being borrowed someone else's for me. They also recommended me a cook who would prepare anything I wished for thirty kopeks a month if I intended to buy my food outside. It goes without saying that they borrowed money of me and each came for a loan three times on the very first day.

Nobility stripped of rank is frowned upon in prison. Though deprived of all privileges and put on an equal footing with the rest, they were never regarded as comrades by the convicts. This was no conscious attitude, but an inborn and sincere prejudice. They still looked upon us as noblemen, though they liked to taunt us with our misfortune.

"It's all over now! Used to be: Pyotr was always so well kempt, but now the poor man is plucking hemp!"

And there were many more pleasantries of this sort. They seemed to be gloating over our misery which we tried to conceal as well as we could. It went especially hard with us at work because we were not as strong as they and could not pull our weight. Nothing is more difficult than to gain the confidence of the common people and especially of people such as these.

There were only a few of us who were noblemen. First, there were five Poles of whom I shall speak later. The convicts disliked them even more than the Russian noblemen. The Poles—I mean the political offenders—were pointedly polite, extremely unsociable and unable to conceal their loathing, which the convicts felt very well and repaid in the same coin.

It took me two years to gain the good will of at least some of the convicts. In the end, however, most of them liked me and said that I was "not a bad fellow."

There were five Russian noblemen, counting myself. I had heard of one of them even before I arrived. He was a vile creature, horribly depraved, and an informer by inclination. I kept away from him from the first day. The second was the parricide whom I have already mentioned. The third was Akim Akimovich, a rare eccentric of whom I still have a lively recollection. He was tall, lean, weak-minded, abysmally ignorant yet always lecturing others, and as meticulous as a German. The convicts laughed at him, but feared him on account of his

quarrelsome, carping, and truculent nature. He was at home among them from the first moment, wrangling and even fighting with them. His honesty verged on the phenomenal. Whenever he noticed an injustice, he at once got himself embroiled even if the matter did not concern him at all. His honesty was matched only by his simplicity. He would upbraid the convicts for stealing and exhort them in all earnest to reform. I made friends with him on the very first day and he told me his story. He had once been a lieutenant in the Caucasus. He had begun his career as a cadet in an infantry regiment and served a long time before he was commissioned and sent to some fortress as chief officer. A local friendly princeling had set fire to his fort and attacked the place unsuccessfully one night. Akim Akimovich had pretended not to know who the culprit was and the crime was ascribed to a hostile tribe. A month later, he invited the princeling to pay him a friendly visit and when the man arrived all unsuspecting, mustered the garrison and began to reproach his visitor before the ranks. He argued that it was disgraceful to set a fort on fire, minutely explaining how a friendly prince ought to behave, and then had him shot. Thereupon he sent a detailed report to his superiors, was brought to trial, and given the death sentence which was commuted to twelve years of hard labour in the second category in Siberia. He knew that he had not done the right thing and that a friendly prince should be tried in court. He said that he had known it all along, even before he had had him shot. In spite of this he seemed incapable of a genuine understanding of his guilt.

"Didn't he set my fort on fire? Did they expect me to thank him for it?" he would exclaim to my objections.

Though the convicts made fun of Akim Akimovich's weak-mindedness, they respected him for his skill and neatness.

He knew all the trades. He was a cobbler; a joiner, a house-painter, a gilder, a locksmith and had acquired a knack for all these things in prison. He had no need for instruction: he would look at a thing and then make it. He turned out various boxes, baskets, lanterns, toys, and other things which he sold in town. He used the money to buy spare linen, softer pillows and even acquired a folding mattress. We slept in the same barrack and he was very helpful to me when I first came.

Before leaving the prison for work the convicts were drawn up in two rows before the guardhouse, while their convoys with loaded rifles took up positions on both sides. An officer of the Engineers then arrived with a superintendent and several assistants who were to be in charge of various groups. The superintendent counted the convicts and assigned each group their task.

I was sent to the workshop, together with some other prisoners—a low brick house in a large yard heaped with materials. There was a blacksmith's, a locksmith's, a carpenter's, a painter's and so on. Akim Akimovich worked in the paintshop, boiling linseed oil, mixing the paints, and staining furniture to look like walnut.

While I was waiting to have my fetters changed, I fell to talking with Akim Akimovich and told him my first impressions.

"No, they do not like the gentry," he said, "and especially those condemned for political offences. They would eat them alive if they could, and no wonder. First of all, you do not belong to them and secondly, they have all been either serfs or soldiers. Judge for yourself if they can sympathize with us or not. It's bad enough here, but the penal battalions in European Russia are even worse. There are some who came from there, they can't praise our prison enough, they say it's heaven after the hell they had been to. And it is not that the work is harder there. They say the officials in charge of

the first grade convicts there are not all military men, at least their methods are quite different from what they are here. A convict is allowed to live on his own. That's what they say, I haven't been there. They wear no uniforms; their heads are not shaved. But, come to think of it, it's a good thing that we have the same clothes and shave our heads the same way. It's more orderly and agreeable to the eye. Of course, they don't like it. But then look at the riff-raff: one is a former recruit, another a Circassian, a third an Old Faith believer, a fourth a God-fearing peasant with children at home, a fifth is a Jew, a sixth a gypsy, and a seventh God knows what, and all are expected to live quietly side by side, eat from one bowl and sleep on the same planks. And what semblance of freedom do they have? Snatching an extra morsel on the sly, or slipping an extra kopek into one's boots? It's always prison, there's nothing but prison.... Mischief is bound to get into their heads."

I had known all this before. I was anxious to learn from Akim Akimovich something about our major. He told me what he knew and the impression I gained was far from pleasant.

I was destined to be at the mercy of this man for two years and found that all that Akim Akimovich had told me was true, with the difference that the impression of reality was even stronger. What made him terrible was that a man like him was vested with almost unlimited power over two hundred souls. Apart from this, he was merely a vicious and disorderly person, nothing more. He regarded the convicts as his natural enemies and this was his first and principal fault. He had some good qualities, but even these were perverted by his lack of self-restraint and spitefulness. He would burst into the barracks like a bomb-shell, sometimes in the middle of the night, and, noticing that some convict happened to be sleeping on his left side, would mark him down for

punishment in the morning to make him sleep on his right "as I had ordered." His face was choleric and purple and he was feared and hated like the plague. We all knew that his orderly Fedka could do as he liked with him. The only being he cared for was his poodle Tresorka and he nearly went out of his mind when the animal fell ill. They say that he sobbed over it as if it were his own son. He drove away the veterinary, almost coming to blows with him, and immediately summoned a convict whom Fedka recommended as a man who had picked up some knowledge and effected wonderful cures.

"Help me. I'll give you anything you like if you save Tresorka," he pleaded.

The prisoner, a cunning Siberian peasant, was not a bad veterinary, but shrewd like all of his kind.

"I had a look at Tresorka lying there on a white pillow on the sofa," he related a long time afterwards when the matter was nearly forgotten, "and saw that he had an inflammation which could be cured with bleeding. I was sure that he would get well. But what if he didn't, I thought? 'No, Your Excellency, there's nothing I can do,' I said. 'You've called me too late. If I'd seen your dog yesterday or the day before, I could have done something, but there's no use trying now.'"

And so Tresorka died.

I was also told about an attempt to kill the major. There was one among us who had been known for his meek behaviour for several years. He had hardly ever talked to anyone and was looked upon as something of a half-wit. He knew how to read and spent most of his nights reading his bible. He would get up when all were asleep, climb onto the stove, light a church taper, open the book, and read till morning. He did this night after night for a year until one day he told the sergeant that he would not go to work. He was at once reported to the major who flew into his customary rage and rushed

to the barrack at once. When he burst in, the convict hurled a brick at him which he had prepared beforehand, but missed. He was seized at once, tried, and punished. It all happened very quickly. He died in the infirmary within three days. In his last moments, he declared that he had hated no one, but had merely desired to suffer. Yet he had never belonged to any religious sect. He was always remembered with respect by the convicts.

My fetters were finished at last. Meanwhile, a number of bread vendors appeared one by one, some of them little girls who came to sell the rolls that their mothers had baked. When they reached maturity, they continued to come, though without the rolls. It had become a custom. But some of the vendors were grown women too. A roll cost half a kopek and the convicts were sure to buy all of them.

One of the convicts, grey-haired, but with a fresh, ruddy face, was jesting with the girls. He had tied a red scarf around his neck before they arrived. A fat, pock-marked wench set her basket on his work-bench.

"Why didn't you come yesterday?" the convict began with a complacent smile.

"Didn't I? I did come, but where were you, I wonder?"

"We were called away or I'd have been there. All the other girls were there the day before yesterday."

"Just who?"

"Maryashka, Khavroshka, Chekunda and Half-Kopek."

"Is it possible?" I asked Akim Akimovich.

"It happens sometimes," he said lowering his eyes, for he was an extremely virtuous man.

It did indeed happen sometimes, but very rarely and with frightful difficulties. The convicts preferred to spend their money on drink despite their natural urge sharpened by confinement. Women were hard to come by. It was first necessary to agree on the time and place,



to find privacy which was especially hard, to win the consent of the guards which was harder still, and, in general, to squander prodigious sums, comparatively speaking. Still, during my term I happened to be an involuntary witness of several love scenes. One day, three of us were heating a brick kiln in a barn on the bank of the Irtysh, the guards happened to be easy-going men and two of the "prompters," as they were called by the convicts, soon appeared.

"What kept you so long?" said the prisoner who had been expecting them. "I bet you were at Zverkov's."

"Was I long? Just now a crow sat on a post longer than I stayed at Zverkov's," she answered cheerfully.

She was the dirtiest female in the world. Her name was Chekunda and she had come accompanied by Half-Kopek who baffled all description.

"It's a long time since we've seen anything of you," said the gallant to Half-Kopek. "You seem to have lost weight."

"I may have! I used to be very plump, but now I'm like a needle."

"Running after the soldiers, is it?"

"Now there you go, repeating the nasty tripe that people say. But then why not? Better lose a rib than the ribbing of a soldier!"

"You'd better give them the go-by and make love to us because we have money."

Imagine this gallant with his shaven crown, fetters on his ankles, in a two-coloured shirt, and guarded by a soldier!

I took leave of Akim Akimovich at last and returned to the barrack under guard. The other inmates were returning too. The first to come back were those who had been given fixed assignments, which was the only way to make the convicts try harder. The tasks were enormous sometimes, and yet were done more quickly than

they would have been if the convicts had been compelled to work until the dinner drum. Finished with his task, the convict was allowed to return to the barrack undisturbed.

Those who came in first were the first to eat. Besides, the mess barrack would not have held them all if they had come at once. I tried the cabbage soup, but being as yet unused to it, could not get it down and brewed some tea instead. I was sitting at the end of the table with another convict, a nobleman like myself.

Prisoners came and went, but there was plenty of room as most of them were still working. A group of five sat down together at a large table and the cook dished up two bowls of soup and a platter of fried fish: they were celebrating and the fare was their own. From time to time they cast unfriendly glances upon us. One of the Poles came in and took a seat next to us.

"I've been away, but I know just the same what's been going on!" shouted a tall convict entering the mess barrack and looking around.

He was a lean, wiry man of about fifty. There was something shrewd, yet gay in his features. His fleshy lower lip gave him a comical expression.

"Have you slept well? Why don't you say good morning? Regards to my friends from Kursk," he said sitting down next to the feasters. "I'll be glad to join you!"

"We're not from Kursk."

"From Tambov, perhaps?"

"No, not from Tambov either. You'll get nothing from us, brother. You'd better find some richer men and join them."

"The trouble is, brothers, I've nothing but Ivan the Griper and Marya Hic-cupovna in my belly today. Where do those rich men live, d'you know?"

"Gazin is rich enough. You go to him."

"He's on a spree, squandering the whole of his nest egg!"

"Yes, they say he had about twenty-five rubles," somebody remarked. "It pays to sell vodka."

"So you won't let me join you? Oh well, I'll have to eat the prison grub then."

"If you want some tea, speak to those gentlefolk over there."

"There are no gentlefolk here. They're no better than we," growled a convict who had said nothing till now.

"I wouldn't mind, but I'm ashamed to ask them. I respect myself too much," explained the convict with the fleshy lip as he looked at us good-naturedly.

"Won't you have some tea with us?" I said invitingly. "Please do."

"Won't I? Of course I will." He got up and approached our table.

"Used to guzzle his cabbage soup with a bast shoe when he was home, but now he's got to have a gentleman's drink," the morose convict commented again.

"Doesn't anyone drink tea here?" I asked, but he did not deign to reply.

"The rolls are coming! If I'm going to have tea, couldn't I have a roll, as well?"

A young prisoner appeared, carrying an armful of rolls, and began to sell them to the convicts. For every ten that he sold, the baker gave him one for his trouble.

"White rolls! White rolls!" he cried as he entered the mess room. "Fresh from Moscow and all of them hot! I'd eat them myself if I had the money. Hey, fellows, there's only one left. Buy it, someone, if you have a heart and a mother!"

This appeal to maternal love made everyone laugh and several of his white rolls were bought at once.

"Listen, fellows. Seems to me that Gazin will drink himself into trouble. He's picked a fine time for it, I must say. Eight-Eyes may turn up any minute!"

"They'll hide him. Is he very drunk?"

"And how! And fighting-drunk too!"

"Well, he'll get another thrashing."

"Whom are they talking about?" I asked the Pole who sat next to me.

"About Gazin, the convict who sells spirits. Whenever he gets a bit of money together, he drinks it away to the last kopek. He's cruel and vicious. He's not a loud man when he's sober, but once he's drunk you can see it all over him. He falls on people with a knife and has to be restrained."

"How is it done?"

"Some ten of the men jump on him and beat him unconscious. When he's about half dead, they put him on his bunk and cover him with his sheepskin."

"But they might kill him that way!"

"Not him! He's very strong, stronger than anybody here and he's the healthiest of the lot. He's perfectly fit the very next day."

"Please tell me one thing: these people are also eating food bought outside, why then do they seem so envious of my tea?"

"Your tea has nothing to do with it. They dislike you because you're a gentleman and altogether different from them. They would be glad to pick a quarrel with you, they'd like to insult and humiliate you somehow. There's a lot of trouble of this sort waiting for you. We have a terribly hard time of it here. Yes, we're worse off in all respects. You've got to learn to ignore it. They'll be swearing at you for your tea and food more than once, you may be sure, though very many of them also buy additional food and some drink tea regularly. It's all right for them, but not for you."

He got up and left the table. In a few minutes, his prediction came true.

### III

#### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

No sooner had M-sky,\* the Pole, left than Gazin staggered into the mess room quite drunk.

The sight of a drunken convict in broad daylight when everyone was supposed to be out at work—to say nothing of the dreaded major who could have come at any moment, the watchfulness of the sergeant who never left the prison and the presence of the soldiers and barrack invalids—quite upset the ideas I had just formed of convict life. It took me quite a long time to understand the things I found so puzzling in the early days.

I have already said that every convict had some hobby, his natural need under the conditions. Besides, each was passionately fond of money, treasured it almost on a par with freedom, and was nearly content if he could but jingle a few coins in his pocket. If he had none, he was melancholy, restless, dejected, and ready to steal or do anything if only to acquire some. But precious though money was in prison, it would never stay long with its happy possessor. For one thing, it was hard to keep from being confiscated or stolen. The major seized all money he could find during his surprise raids. It is possible that he used it to improve convict food, but, be it as it may, it always fell into his hands. More often than not, however, it was simply stolen. One could vouch for no one in this respect. A means of keeping it safely was discovered later on. It was found that it could be safely banked with the pious Old Faith believer from Starodubye.\*\*

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\* Reference is to Alexander Mirecki, who took part in a revolutionary conspiracy against tsardom in Russia. In 1846 he was sentenced to ten years hard labour.—*Ed.*

\*\* Starodubye—the place in Chernigov Gubernia, the Ukraine, where Old Faith believers from the Vetka Island on the Sozh River fled to from the government's persecution in middle eighteenth century.—*Ed.*

I feel I must say a few words about this old man, though it is somewhat apart from my story. He was a grey little man of sixty who came to the prison a year after I did. He caught my imagination at once. He was so unlike the other prisoners, there was something so serene and gentle in his look. It gave me a peculiar pleasure to look into his clear bright eyes surrounded with the finest of wrinkles. I talked to him often and must say that I have rarely met a kinder and more good-natured man. His crime was considered very grave. A number of the Old Faith believers at Starodubye had been converted to the Orthodox religion. The government encouraged and supported them and tried hard to convert the other dissenters as well. Resolved to defend the faith, the old man and some other impassioned believers set fire to the Orthodox church which was being erected for the converts. The old man was sentenced to hard labour as one of the ringleaders. He had been a well-to-do trader, had left a wife and family to go courageously into exile ecstatically certain that he was suffering for the faith.

After living in his company for a time, one could not help wondering how this meek, docile man could ever have been a rebel. We also talked about his faith several times and though he was as firm in his convictions as ever, he never expressed bitterness or hatred. Yet he had destroyed a church and was quite candid about it. One might think that according to his belief, his offence and martyrdom were things to be proud of, but closely as I studied him, I never detected any signs of vanity or pride. There were other Old Faith believers among the convicts—Siberians for the most part—who were far from stupid, even shrewd, astonishing dogmatists and strong dialecticians in their own way. They were arrogant, crafty, and intolerant to the extreme. The old man was quite different. Though more of a bible searcher

than any of them, he avoided controversies. He was very sociable, gay and laughed often—not the coarse, cynical laugh of the other convicts, but a soft, clear laugh of childish simplicity which, however, was in keeping with his grey hair. Perhaps I am wrong, but it seems to me that a man may be known by the way he laughs. If you like the laughter of a stranger at the first meeting, you may safely assume that he is a good man.

The old convict had gained the respect of everyone, but was not at all vain about it. The convicts called him grandfather and never quarrelled with him. This gave me an inkling of the influence he must have exercised on the other believers. But staunch as he may have seemed, there was a deep-seated, inconsolable sorrow within him though he tried to conceal it from all. We slept in the same barrack, and once, at three o'clock in the morning I woke up to a repressed sob. The old man was sitting on the stove bunk (the same where the convict who had wanted to kill the major had sat reading his bible at night) and was poring over his manuscript prayer-book. "Lord do not forsake me," he kept repeating as he wept. "Master! Strengthen me! My poor little children! I'll never see them again!" I can hardly say how much this saddened me.

It was this old man whom the convicts began to trust with their money. Most of the prisoners were thieves, but suddenly all were convinced that the old man was incapable of stealing. Everyone knew that he concealed the money so well that no one could hope to find it. Later, he revealed his secret to me and some of the Poles. In one of the stakes of the stockade there was a knot that was apparently firmly embedded in the wood. But it lifted out and revealed a large hole which was where the old man kept the money. No one would dream of looking for it there.

But to resume the story. What was it that prevented

the convicts from saving their money? It was not only the difficulty of keeping it safe. It was the anguish of prison life. Every man hankered so sorely for freedom and thanks to his very position had become so light-minded and erratic that he was naturally inclined to have a grand fling, to blow off all his wealth in one wild revel with thunder and music if only to buy a moment of forgetfulness. It was strange to watch some of them toiling away for months only to squander all their earnings in one day, and then again begin plodding for months on end till the next spree. Many of them were fond of new clothes, especially something off-regulation wear: black trousers, Russian coats and Siberian vests. Calico shirts and handsome belts with brass buckles were also in vogue. The dandy would dress in all his finery on holidays and strut through the barracks with childish delight, admired by all. They were indeed children in many ways. His finery, however, was soon sold or pledged for a trifle, often before the day was out. His spree, however, was not a spontaneous affair. It would be timed either with his birthday or a church holiday. He would put a taper before the icon in the morning and say his prayers. Then he would dress up and order his dinner: meat and fish and Siberian dumplings. He would then gorge himself, almost invariably alone. Then came the vodka and soon afterwards he would be tottering through the barracks, swaggering and trying to show how drunk he was, what a wild time he was having and thus gain general esteem. Russians cannot help feeling a certain sympathy for a drunken man and in prison this sentiment verged on respect.

There was something distinguished about the prison spree. The merry-maker would invariably order a musician. There was a run-away Polish soldier among us, a rotten little chap, who could play a violin and actually had one, the only thing of value he owned. He had no



trade and his only means of earning a kopek was to follow the celebrating convict from barrack to barrack, scraping his fiddle for all he was worth. His features not infrequently expressed boredom and disgust, but the cry: "You got paid, didn't you?" would goad him to attack his instrument with fresh fury. Every drunkard could rely on being well taken care of if the need arose; he would be put to bed or hidden away by the others in the event of a visit from the major--and all quite disinterestedly. The sergeant and the barrack invalids, for their part, could be perfectly sure that the drunk would cause no trouble. All the convicts kept a solicitous eye on the merry-maker and at the least signs of violence he would be promptly restrained or even tied up. The lower prison functionaries, therefore, turned a blind eye on these irregularities. They knew that worse things might happen if vodka were forbidden.

But where did the vodka come from? It was sold by the "tapsters." There were several of them among the convicts and their trade was brisk and steady in spite of the fact that the tipplers were few. Revelry was expensive and money hard to earn. The drink traffic was begun and carried on in a queer manner. For instance, a certain convict had neither a trade nor an inclination to work (there are such) but he had a wish to get rich and, being an impatient man, was determined to do it as quickly as he could. The possessor of a small sum of money, he decided to invest it in the liquor trade, a risky enterprise since he hazarded not only his capital and goods, but his hide as well. The would-be-tapster, however, was not to be deterred by obstacles. To begin with, he had to smuggle the liquor in by himself. Having sold it at a good profit, he repeated the operation a second and a third time and, if he was not caught by the guards, he soon acquired a sum sufficient to set up a real business. He then employed agents and assistants, thereby risking

much less and gaining far more as it was they who had to take the chances now.

There were plenty of convicts who had squandered everything in drinking, gambling, and riotous living. They had no trade, went ragged and wretched, but there was in them a certain desperate daring. The only thing they could turn to account now was their skin, and the destitute rake offered his services to the enterprising tapster as a smuggler. Each of the richer liquor dealers had several men working for him in this way. Somewhere outside the prison there were people—former soldiers or small shopkeepers or perhaps wenches—who for relatively exorbitant sums bought vodka and hid it in some nook where the prisoners were brought to work. These buyers usually sampled the vodka first and generously replaced what they had drunk with water. The convict was free to reject it of course, but he could not be too particular. He was glad that his money had not been lost altogether and that he was receiving some sort of vodka, whatever the quality, in exchange. The smugglers, whom the tapster introduced to the buyers beforehand, procured an ox gut which, after rinsing, had been filled with water to keep it soft and supple and ready to be used to hold vodka. Having filled the casing with vodka, the smuggler wound it round the less conspicuous parts of his body, a matter which took all his adroitness and cunning, since his honour, as it were, was at stake. He had to outwit both the escorts and the guards and usually succeeded. Any good smuggler was more than a match for a guard, especially a raw recruit. The smuggler first made a study of his guards, of course. The time and place for the operation had to be carefully considered as well. Supposing a convict, employed as a stove-maker, was seen climbing on to a high stove; no one would prevent him and no guard would follow him. Returning to the prison, he always carried a ten or fifteen

kopek piece in his hand, knowing that every man was sure to be searched by the corporal on guard before the gates could be opened. He usually hoped that the corporal would be ashamed to examine him too intimately. Yet, there were cases when the corporal was callous enough for that, and found the vodka. If that happened, there was one remaining chance of salvation: he would stealthily slip the coin into the corporal's hand, and often enough this helped and the vodka was safely delivered. There were times when the trick failed, however, and the smuggler was compelled to surrender his final capital—his back. The case would be reported to the major and the "capital" would be severely flogged and the vodka confiscated. The smuggler took all the blame and did not betray his employer, not because it would have been a disgraceful thing to do, but solely because this would have been to his own disadvantage. He would be flogged just the same and his only consolation would be that the drink dealer would be flogged as well. But then, he still needed the dealer, although according to custom and by prearrangement he received nothing from his employer for his misfortune. As for informers in general, they thrived as a rule. No harm was ever done to the informers. There was no thought even of indignation or of shunning them. The prisoners, indeed, often made friends with them. If someone had tried to explain all the vileness of informing, no one in the prison would have understood. The depraved nobleman with whom I had broken all relations was a friend of Fedka, the major's servant, and kept him informed of everything that took place in the barrack. His tales, to be sure, were faithfully relayed to the major. Everybody knew this, yet no one tried to teach him a lesson or as much as reproach the scoundrel.

But I have digressed again. When the vodka came safely through, the tapster paid the smuggler for his efforts and

made his accounts. His merchandise, he reckoned, had already cost him a good deal, he therefore diluted it with water nearly by one half, and was ready for custom. His client would turn up on the first holiday or even on a week day, a convict who had been saving his money kopek by kopek against the day when he could squander it all at once. That happy day had indeed stood out in his imagination by day and night, asleep and at work. Its radiance had warmed his soul throughout the worst boredom of prison life. At last his dawn would break: the money saved, unconfiscated, and unstolen, and now placed in the hands of the dealer. The tapster would first give him some vodka that was almost pure, that is, it had been diluted only twice. As much as was poured from the bottle was instantly replaced with water. The price of a glass of vodka was five or six times greater than at an inn. It may be imagined, therefore, how many glasses of such vodka had to be taken to get drunk and at what a price. But after his long period of forced abstinence, the convict would succumb very easily and keep drinking as long as his money lasted. After this, he would pawn his things—no difficult matter since the tapster was also a pawnbroker. The first to go would be his fine new clothes, then the older things, and at last the regulation wear that he had been issued. When the last rag was gone, he would go to bed to wake up the next morning with a terrible headache and vainly beg the tapster for a drop of vodka to pick him up. Melancholy and depressed, he set to work again and toiled wearily for months, wistfully looking back to the happy day that had gone for ever. Gradually, he recovered his courage and waited patiently for another such day which was still far off, but must come eventually.

As for the tapster, he would at last find himself in the possession of the princely sum of twenty or thirty rubles and would buy some more vodka which, this time, he did

not dilute since it was intended for himself. Enough of trading! It was time for him to have a bit of fun himself and so he too would go on a spree with drinking, eating, and music. His resources were far greater and even allowed him to grease the palms of the lower officers. His spree would last for several days. His own vodka would soon be gone and he would turn to another dealer who had been waiting just for this and would keep on drinking until he was ruined too. However carefully the convicts concealed the antics of their drunken comrades, it was inevitable that the major or officer on guard would sometimes catch one of them, take him to the guard-house, confiscate his money, and flog him to boot. Several days later, the convict would resume his traffic in spirits.

Some of the revellers, especially the richer among them, were admirers of the fair sex. For a large sum of money, the guard would sneak them out to the suburbs of the town instead of to work and there, in some quiet little house, a real banquet would be arranged regardless of the cost. Even a convict was not scoffed at if he had money. Of course, one had to be careful in one's choice of guards. They, as a rule, were likely candidates for the convict prison themselves. Still, there is little that money cannot do and such adventures as I have described were rarely discovered. But they were very expensive and therefore infrequent, and the admirers of the fair sex, therefore, could usually find safer means to gain their ends.

From the beginning of my term my attention was caught by a young convict who was exceptionally handsome. Young Sirotkin, no more than twenty-three years old, was enigmatic in many respects. His handsome features were the first thing that struck me. He belonged to the special grade of indefinite term prisoners and was consequently regarded as one of the most grave offenders. He was mild and quiet, talked little and laughed

rarely. He had blue eyes, regular features, a clear complexion, and fair hair. He had such a sweet face that even his shaved crown could not disfigure him. He had no trade, but often had a little money. He was rather lazy and slovenly. If someone gave him a red calico shirt he would be overjoyed and exhibit the new thing everywhere. He never drank, played cards or quarrelled. He was fond of strolling behind the barracks with his hands in his pockets, quiet and thoughtful. It was difficult to guess his thoughts. If one called to him and asked him about something, he would answer politely, not at all like a convict, but somehow reluctantly. And the look in his eyes would be like that of a ten-year-old boy. If he had any money, he never spent it on anything useful—such as having his shirt mended or getting a new pair of boots—but would buy a cake or a bun and eat it then and there like a little boy. “Ah, Sirotkin,\* you little orphan!” the others would say to him. When he was not at work, he liked to visit the other barracks. Others might be engaged with their various hobbies, but he would be aimlessly wandering about. Whenever anyone said anything rude to him—something about him and his ilk—he would turn quietly and go to another barrack. If the pleasantry at his expense was too strong, he would only blush. I often wondered why this quiet artless creature was here? I got to talking with him one day in the infirmary when he happened to be lying ill in the next cot. More talkative than usual, he told me how he had been recruited, how his mother had seen him off in tears and what a hard life he had had as a soldier. He had never been able to get used to it because everyone had been so stern and hard, and the officers had been displeased with him too.

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\* The name has the same root as the word *sirotka*—little orphan.—*Tr.*

"But why were you sent here? And to the special section at that, you poor orphan?"

"I was in the army only a year, Alexander Petrovich, and they sent me here because I killed Grigory Petrovich, our platoon officer."

"So I have heard, but I refuse to believe it. How could you kill anybody!"

"It just happened, Alexander Petrovich. I was very unhappy."

"But how about the other recruits? They manage to live somehow, don't they? It's hard for them to get used to the life at first, but they end up by making good soldiers. I'm afraid your mother has spoiled you with ginger bread and milk till the day you were eighteen."

"My mother was very fond of me, that's true. When I went to the army, she took to her bed and never recovered. It was so hard, that life in the army. The officer was always finding fault and punishing me and what for? I obeyed everyone, didn't drink vodka or take things from anyone, and that, Alexander Petrovich, is a bad thing, taking things. And everybody was so hard-hearted that I had to go off sometimes and have a cry. Once, I was put on guard over the rifle-stacks at night. It was autumn and blowing so hard, and it was so dark that I could not see anything. I was so sad, so sad. I grounded the rifle, unfixed the bayonet, put the muzzle against my breast and with my toe—I had taken my boot off—pressed the trigger. The gun missed fire. I cleaned the chamber, put some new powder into it, scraped the flint, and placed the barrel against my chest again. The powder flashed, but the gun misfired as before. No luck. I put on my boot, fixed the bayonet and began to walk up and down and that's when I decided to do what I did. I was ready to do anything, only to get out. In half an hour, the officer in charge of the watch, making the rounds, came straight to me. 'Is that the way to stand guard!'

I swung my musket round according to the rules and thrust the bayonet into him up to the muzzle. I then had to run the gauntlet for four thousand strokes and was sent here to the special section."

I could see that he was telling the truth. How else could he have been sent to the special section? Ordinary crimes were not punished so severely.

Sirotkin was the only one of his kind who was so handsome. As for the others, some fifteen of them, they were horrible to look at. Two or three were passable, but the others were disgusting with huge drooping ears and even more slovenly than Sirotkin. Some of them even had grey hair. I shall speak of these further on if I have the chance.

Sirotkin was often friendly with Gazin, with whom I began this chapter relating how he staggered into the mess barrack very drunk and thus upset my first notions of the rigidity of prison rules. Gazin was a frightful animal who produced a gruesome, agonizing impression on everyone who saw him. I could not imagine anything more ferocious and monstrous. In Tobolsk I once saw Kameneyev, the notoriously cruel highway robber, and later Sokolov, a deserter and callous murderer then on trial, but neither had seemed as repulsive as Gazin. He reminded me of a huge spider. He was a Tatar, stronger than any of the convicts, slightly above medium height but of herculean build. He had an ugly, disproportionately enormous head, and walked with a stooping gait, lowering at all who came his way. Strange stories were told of him. Some said that he was once a soldier, others that he had escaped from a convict prison in Nerchinsk, that he had been sent to Siberia again and again, but each time escaped and changed his name until he finally landed in the special section. It was told that he had taken special pleasure in killing little children, that he would lead a child to some deserted place and after frighten-



ing it and having fully enjoyed the terrors and convulsions of his little victim, would kill it slowly and deliberately. But perhaps all these horrors had been merely invented because of the impression he made on the convicts. Still, the stories somehow fitted him, though he seemed prudent enough when sober. He was always quiet then, never quarrelled, as though he held the others too much in contempt for that. He said very little and was pointedly unsociable. His movements were measured and confident. It was clear from his eyes that he was both intelligent and shrewd, but there was something cruel, haughty and derisive about his face and especially his smile. He was one of the most prosperous of the prison's vodka dealers. He drank once or twice a year, and on these occasions all the brutishness in him came to the surface. He would begin by taunting the other prisoners with venomous thrusts well calculated and apparently thought out long beforehand. When he was completely drunk he would fly into a rage, seize a knife, and rush upon his companions who would scatter and hide, knowing that he might full well kill the first person he met. But finally they learned how to cope with him. About ten of the prisoners would suddenly hurl themselves upon him, showering him with blows. They would hit him on the breast, under the heart, in the pit of the stomach, in the belly, and it is hard to imagine anything more merciless than that beating. They would stop only when he had collapsed like a dead man. They would never have dared to beat another man that way—it would most certainly have killed him, but not Gazin. They would wrap his limp body in his coat and carry him to his bunk. "He'll be all right!" they would say. And sure enough, he would get up in the morning almost well and go to work silent and morose as always. The prisoners knew how the day would end every time he got drunk. He knew it too, of course, but got drunk

just the same. This went on for several years until he began visibly to weaken. He complained of pains here and there and went into hospital more and more often. "He's giving in," the prisoners talked among themselves.

And so Gazin entered the mess barrack followed by the nasty little Pole whom the convicts usually employed to scrape his violin to fill the cup of their happiness. He came to a halt in the middle of the room and stood looking about, scrutinizing those who were present. No one breathed a word. At last he fixed me and my comrade with a leering stare, his face breaking into a self-satisfied smile. Then he seemed to have made up his mind and approached our table, staggering wildly.

"Might I ask," he began (he spoke Russian fluently), "where you get the income to afford teas?"

I exchanged glances with my comrade, realizing that it would be better to say nothing since any retort was sure to put him in a passion.

"So you have money, eh?" he went on. "Pots of money, eh? But have you been sent to hard labour to drink teas? Have you or have you not? Answer me, you...."

He grew livid when he saw our determination to say nothing and, trembling with fury, seized a huge tray, which ordinarily served to hold at least half of the bread for dinner or supper, and swung it over his head. He could have crushed our heads with a single motion. And everyone stood breathless and waiting, though murder or even attempted murder would bring endless trouble upon the entire prison—there would be no end of raids, examinations, and strict measures—and the convicts were always anxious to avoid such things. No one stood up for us! No one raised a voice to stop Gazin. That is how much they hated us! It seemed that they were glad that we were in danger. Luckily for us, something did intervene, just as Gazin was about to let fly.

"Gazin! Your vodka's been stolen!" someone shouted from the hall.

The tray clattered to the floor with a horrible crash and Gazin flew from the mess barrack like a madman.

"Well, God has saved them," said the convicts about us and repeated this again and again later on.

I was never to learn whether his vodka had been really stolen or whether it had been just a ruse to save our lives.

Walking behind the barracks that evening before the locking of the doors, I was seized with a greater sadness than at any time in my prison life. The first day of confinement is bitter whether in prison or at hard labour. But I was tormented most of all by a thought that gave me no rest in all the years, a question that I was never able to fathom: Why were the same crimes punished differently? It was true, though, that crimes differed so widely, too, that it was impossible to compare them. Say, two different people commit murder; the circumstances are minutely examined. As a result, they receive almost the same punishment and yet what a world of difference there is between their actions! The one committed murder for some trifle, for an onion perhaps. He has killed a peasant on the high road and found an onion on the corpse and nothing more. "Well, Father, you've sent me out on the high road. I've killed that peasant yonder and all that I got is an onion." "You fool! An onion is worth a kopek and a hundred men would bring you a ruble." (Prison parable.) Now the other man might have killed a tyrant to defend the honour of his betrothed, his sister or daughter. Some vagrant might have been compelled to kill while fighting off a host of pursuers, fighting for his life and freedom though himself probably half-starving, while another may have slaughtered little children for the pleasure of feeling their warm blood flow over his hands and seeing their terror, their last quiver

beneath the knife. And all alike are sent to hard labour. The length of the sentences may vary, of course, but such variations are not many, whereas variations in crime may be counted by the thousand. There are as many crimes as there are characters. Granted that the problem is much like that of the squaring of the circle. But even if this unfairness did not exist, there would still be the difference in the effect of the punishment to be considered. One of the convicts may be wasting away like a candle, while another had never dreamed that prison could be such a jolly place with such hearty companions. Yes, there are some like that too. Now just compare them with a cultivated man who has a conscience, a sense of right and wrong, and is not deprived of feeling. The aching of his heart alone will kill him more surely than his sentence. His own judgement of himself may be more pitiless than that of the law, and he is compelled to live cheek by jowl with another convict who has never once thought of his crime and does not even believe that he has done wrong. There are, indeed, some who commit crimes deliberately to get into hard labour and thus escape liberty which is harder for them than imprisonment. It may be that his life before was miserable, that he never ate his fill and was compelled to work for his master from morn till night, while the work in the convict prison is easier, there's enough bread, and better bread than he had ever hoped to eat, let alone meat on holidays, alms, and the opportunity to earn some money by doing a little work in the evenings. And what of the company? Sharp, wide-awake men who know everything. The new man regards his friends with admiration and feels that he has come among the best possible company. Can anyone say that the same punishment meted out to the two is really the same? But enough of riddles. The drum is beating and it is time to go back to the barracks.

## IV

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

After the last roll-call each barrack was locked with its own key and the convicts were shut in until dawn.

The roll was called by a sergeant and two soldiers. The convicts were sometimes drawn up in the courtyard to be inspected by the officer on guard, but more often the ceremony had a domestic character and the checking was done in the barracks. That is what happened on the first day of my arrival. The guards miscounted us several times, went and came again, but at last the figure tallied and the barrack was securely locked. There were as many as thirty prisoners tightly cramped on the plank shelves. As it was too early to go to sleep, each man had to find something to do.

Besides the old invalid who represented the authorities in the barrack there was the barrack elder appointed from among the convicts by the major for good conduct. It often happened, however, that the elders were caught at some serious offence, were flogged and demoted. Akim Akimovich was the elder in our barrack and, to my surprise, sometimes ran down the prisoners who responded with jibes and jeers. The invalid knew better and did not interfere. If he ever did grumble, it was only for form's sake to keep his conscience clear. He usually sat stitching at a pair of boots unnoticed by anyone.

On the very first day I made an observation which proved to be true later on: those who are not convicts, but have to deal with them—the guards, sentries and all—have an exaggerated idea of the prisoners. They seem to be tensely expecting the prisoners to hurl themselves upon them suddenly with knife in hand. The most remarkable thing about this was that the convicts sensed this fear and drew much of their arrogance from it. Actually, the best warden is the one who is not afraid

of them. Be they arrogant or not, the convicts would rather be trusted than feared. A show of confidence could even win them over. I have noticed how pleasantly impressed they were when an official would enter the prison unaccompanied, something that happened very rarely. The courageous visitor always inspired respect. If some serious offence were afoot, it would never take place in his presence. The terror aroused by the convicts is general, and yet I saw no foundation for it. The fear, perhaps, is inspired by their brigandish appearance. Besides, all who approach a hard labour prison feel that this host of men were gathered here against their will and that, try as one might, it is impossible to turn living men into corpses and stifle their craving for vengeance, their passions and imperious desire to live. True enough this may be, but I am sure there is no cause for fear. A man does not throw himself on his fellow-man knife in hand so quickly. Accidents happen of course, but they are so rare that the danger is very slight. Needless to say, I am speaking of prisoners already convicted and many of whom are glad to have at last reached their destination, the convict prison. A new life is always welcome and they are mostly content to live peacefully. And besides, the convicts themselves would not allow the violent spirits among them to do much mischief. And reckless as the convict may be, he is himself afraid of everything that he finds in the convict prison. Things are different in the case of the accused who has not yet been sentenced and is awaiting punishment. Such a man is capable of attacking anyone for the simple reason that his punishment is to take place the next day, and a fresh crime would start a new case against him and delay it. The motive here is "to change his lot" as quickly as possible.

I heard of a very curious story of this kind. A former soldier had been sentenced to two years hard labour in

the military section without deprivation of his rights. He was a braggart and a coward, both qualities uncommon in the Russian soldier. Our soldiers, usually, are so busy that they have no time for bragging even if they want to. A braggart, on the other hand, is always a loafer and a coward. Dutov, as this soldier was called, had served his short term and was returned to his battalion. But since his kind usually get quite out of hand at hard labour instead of reforming, it usually happens that they are returned to prison in two or three weeks, this time not for two or three years, but for fifteen or twenty years in the perpetual section. And so it was in this case. Three weeks after his release Dutov committed a burglary, caused a great disturbance besides and was sentenced to corporal punishment. Terrified at the prospect, like the coward he was, he threw himself knife in hand on the officer on duty who entered his cell the day before he was to run the gauntlet. He had known very well that he was aggravating his offence, but all he cared about was to postpone the terrible moment of his flogging for several days or at least for several hours. He assaulted the officer merely for the show of it, without wounding him, only to be tried again.

The moment preceding punishment is terrible of course and I have seen many prisoners on such occasions, usually in hospital when I was ill, which happened fairly often. All the convicts of Russia know that the most compassionate people are the doctors who never make distinctions between them as do all except the common people. In this respect, the doctors are much like the common people who never reproach a criminal for his crime, however grave it may be, and forgive him everything because of the punishment the poor fellow has borne. Characteristically, crimes are called misfortunes in Russia and criminals, unfortunates. It is especially significant that the words are used instinctively. The

doctors, then, are the last refuge for many, especially for those on trial whose lot is harder than that of the sentenced.

Having calculated the probable date of the evil day, the prisoner gets himself sent to hospital to gain a delay. He is invariably agitated when discharged from hospital, knowing full well that the terrible day must come tomorrow. Some try to hide their feelings out of pride, but his comrades are not easily taken in. If they say nothing, it is merely out of tact. A young convict I knew, a former soldier, was sentenced for murder to the maximum number of rods. He was so terrified that he decided to drink a glass of wine brewed with snuff tobacco. I should mention that the prisoner about to be flogged always drinks a dram or two of vodka smuggled into the prison long beforehand at a fabulous price. He would deny himself the most essential things for six months or so to save up the necessary sum to buy a half-pint of vodka and drink it a quarter of an hour before the punishment. The convicts firmly believe that a man who is drunk suffers less from the blows of sticks and whips.

But to return to my narrative. The poor devil immediately fell ill after such a drink, began to vomit blood and was taken to hospital almost unconscious. His lungs were so badly injured that he developed consumption in a few days and died within six months. The doctors who had attended him never learned the cause.

Though I have said that men often turned cowards before punishment, I must add that there were others whose courage was astonishing. I have seen quite a few men whose courage seemed to make them insensitive to pain. I particularly remember one hardened criminal who came to hospital when I was there.

One fine summer day a rumour spread that the well-known highwayman Orlov, a former soldier, was to be flogged that evening and would afterwards be brought



to hospital. The other patients in the infirmary said that the punishment would be cruel and everyone—including myself—awaited his arrival with nervous curiosity. I had long heard extraordinary stories about him. A rare criminal, one capable of murdering old men and children in cold blood, he had enormous will-power and was proudly conscious of it. He had pleaded guilty to several murders and was sentenced to run the gauntlet. It was late when they brought him in. It was already dark and the candles had been lighted. The man was terribly pale and almost unconscious, his jet black hair dishevelled. His swollen back was a livid blue. The prisoners nursed him all night, changed his poultices, turned him from side to side, applied lotions as if he were their father or benefactor. On the next day he had come to and even took one or two turns about the ward. This was amazing. He had looked so broken and weak when they had brought him in! He had received no less than half the blows prescribed by his sentence and the doctor had not intervened until it was clear that the man's life was in danger.

Orlov was below average height. He was not a strong man and his constitution had been undermined by long imprisonment. Those who have seen prisoners on trial will remember their haggard features and feverish looks. In spite of all this, Orlov was convalescing quickly. Some inner spiritual energy seemed to be assisting nature. He was surely no ordinary man. Curiosity prompted me to make his acquaintance and I was able to study him at leisure for the whole of a week. I am positive that I have never met a man with more iron in his character. I had once seen a celebrity of the same kind in Tobolsk, a former brigand chieftain. He was a ferocious brute; the horror of the man was felt before one even knew his name. The most terrifying thing was his spiritual numbness. He represented such a complete triumph of flesh over spirit that one could see at a glance that there was

nothing left in him but a fierce thirst for bodily pleasures, carnal satisfaction. I am certain, however, that Korenev, as he was called, would have quailed at the prospect of punishment, though he had slaughtered his victims without turning a hair. Orlov, on the contrary, represented the triumph over the flesh. It was obvious that this man had a perfect command of himself, despised punishment and feared nothing in the world. He was all energy, thirst for action, thirst for vengeance, thirst for the attainment of his goal. He was also strangely arrogant, looking down on all about him from an incredible height. It was not that he tried to hoist himself on stilts exactly. His haughtiness seemed quite natural in him, something inborn. I am sure that no one could possibly influence him by sheer authority. He regarded everything with odd composure as though there was absolutely nothing that could surprise him. He knew that the other prisoners looked up to him, but never posed, though vanity is a common trait among convicts. He was far from stupid and strangely frank, without being talkative. He answered my questions bluntly and confessed that he was impatiently waiting for his full recovery to be finished with the remainder of the punishment. Before the first part of it, he had feared that he might not survive. "But now," he said with a wink, "it's all over. I'll get the rest of my blows and be sent to Nerchinsk with a convoy of prisoners. I'll get away from them on the road, mark my word. If only my back healed quickly."

And all those five days he waited eagerly to recover sufficiently to be discharged. He was gay at times and in the best of humour. When I tried to talk with him about his adventures, he frowned, but always answered straightforwardly. When he finally realized that I was trying to get at his conscience and searching for some trace of remorse, he looked at me contemptuously as if I were a foolish little boy unworthy of being spoken to. His face

even reflected something like pity for me. After a moment's pause, he laughed gaily, without malicious irony, and I am sure that he must have laughed again when alone and remembering my words.

At last he was discharged, though his back was not quite healed. I too was nearly well and left the infirmary to return to the barrack, while he was convoyed to the guardroom where he had been incarcerated before. He shook hands with me at parting, a mark of respect on his part. I think he did this because he was in good humour over the way he had borne himself. Actually, he must have despised me as a feeble, contemptible, and submissive creature in every way inferior to himself. He was to undergo the second half of his punishment on the very next day.

When the barrack was closed in the evening the interior suddenly assumed quite another aspect—that of a human habitation. It was only then that I could see my companions at ease. During the day, the prisoners wore an air of uneasy expectation; they were constantly aware of the officers, guards, and other officials who might appear at any moment. But as soon as the door was locked, everyone settled in his own place and took up some handiwork. There was plenty of light, since every man produced his own candle and candlestick, mostly of wood. Some set to work stitching boots, others sewing clothes, while the air grew increasingly mephitic. Some of the prisoners sat huddled together in a corner, playing cards on an old rug. In each barrack there was sure to be a prisoner who possessed a candle, an old three-foot rug, and a pack of very greasy cards. The complete set of these articles went under the name of *maydan*. The owner of the *maydan* charged fifteen kopeks a night for its use. The prisoners played "Three Leaves," "The Hill" and other games of chance. Each player heaped all the copper coins that he possessed in front of him and did

not get up until he had lost every one of them or had accumulated all the coins of his comrades. The game was continued until the early hours and at times even to the moment when the door was opened at dawn.

There were beggars in our barrack, as in all the others. Some had been reduced to beggary by drink or gambling and others were beggars by nature. Yes, beggars by nature. There always are and always will be some strange personalities in our country, whatever the conditions, who though peaceful and not at all lazy will ever be beggars by some mysterious behest of destiny. They are always unmarried, always slovenly, always humble and downtrodden. They are for ever fetching and carrying for the newly rich and newly exalted. All initiative and enterprise are a burden and a grief to them. They seem to have been born with the stipulation that they shall never do anything on their own, but always dance to someone else's tune. It is their destiny to do what other people tell them to do. And last but not least, no change of circumstances, no upheavals can make them prosper. They will always be beggars! I have, indeed, noticed them not only among the common people, but in all walks of life, in all groupings, magazines, and associations.

One of these beggars inevitably made his appearance the moment a group of convicts sat down to play. The *maydan* was in fact unthinkable without him. He received five kopeks for a whole night's work and what work it was! He had to keep guard in the dark passage for six or seven hours on end often when it was thirty below, listening for the slightest noises, watching for every footfall out in the yard. The major or the guards would occasionally steal into the barrack very late at night to surprise the players and the home workers burning their private candles which could be detected from the yard. It would be too late to extinguish the candles

and jump on to the bunks when the key was heard grinding in the padlock of the outer door. Such surprises, however, were rare thanks to the beggar on watch who could count on a severe handling from the gamblers if he relaxed his vigilance. Five kopeks was a ridiculously small fee even from the prison point of view. But then the callousness of the convicts who hired others always astonished me in this as in all other cases.

"You've been paid, haven't you! Then do as you're told!" This was an irresistible argument. The employer would squeeze all the service he could out of his kopeks and even more, yet feeling that he was doing a favour to the man he employed. The very drunkard who tossed his money to the winds felt himself duty bound to cheat his servant, something which may perhaps be observed outside of prisons as well.

And so, as I have said, everybody set to work except the gamblers and some five or six convicts who went to bed having nothing better to do. My place on the plank shelf was near the door. Akim Akimovich lay on the other side, his head near mine. He kept himself busy until ten or eleven o'clock, making a Chinese lantern ordered from him in the town at a good price. He made these lanterns skilfully, working methodically and without resting. When finished with it, he put his work things tidily away, unfolded his mattress, said his prayers, and laid himself down like a well-behaved child. He carried his love of order and proper behaviour to the most pedantic lengths. Like all dull and narrow-minded people, he must have regarded himself as an extremely intelligent man. I disliked him from the very first day, and the more I thought about him the more I wondered why such a man should be here and not prospering outside. I shall speak of him more later.

I shall give a brief description of the others in the barrack. I was destined to live with these people for several

years and for that reason I studied them with eager curiosity. To my left there was a group of mountaineers from the Caucasus, who had been imprisoned mostly for robberies. They were two Lezghians, a Circassian and three Daghestan Tatars. The Circassian was a grim, morose sort of man who scarcely spoke and was perpetually looking around with an expression of lowering hatred and a venomous sneer. One of the Lezghians, an old man with a thin aquiline nose, looked the true brigand, but the other, Nurra by name, impressed me most favourably the moment I set eyes on him. He was a young man of middle height, and built like a Hercules. He had fair hair, light blue eyes, a slightly turned-up nose and features of an Ugro-Finnish cast. His legs were bent from his years in the saddle and body was scarred all over with bayonet and bullet wounds. Though he belonged to a peaceful tribe, he had often joined the rebels to raid the Russians. Everyone liked him. He was always gay and friendly, worked without repining, was even-tempered and tranquil, though often indignant over the filth and squalor of our life. Stealing, cheating, drunkenness and anything low and dishonest infuriated him. But he never quarrelled with anyone—he would simply turn away with disgust. He never stole or did one wrong thing all the time he was in prison. Very pious, he read his prayers regularly and fasted before the Moslem holidays with fanatic zeal, sometimes praying all night. Everyone was fond of the man and believed in his honesty. “Nurra is a lion,” the convicts used to say and the name stuck to him. He firmly believed that he would be returned to the Caucasus as soon as his term was over. It was this hope alone that kept him alive. I am sure he would have died had he been deprived of it. He caught my attention on the very first day. I could not help noticing his kind, sympathetic face among the lowering and sneering visages of the others. I had not been in prison for a half-

hour, when he patted my shoulder in passing, laughing good-naturedly into my eyes. I did not know what he meant as he spoke Russian very badly. Soon, he approached me again and once more tapped my shoulder, smiling as before. He did this again and again for three days. As I then guessed and afterwards learned for certain, he wanted to show that he pitied me, that he knew how painful my first days of imprisonment must be; he wanted to encourage me and assure me of his good will and protection. Kind and innocent Nurra!

There were three Daghestan Tatars who were brothers, the two eldest well advanced in age while the youngest, Alei, was no more than twenty-two and looked even younger. He was my neighbour on the shelf. His handsome, frank, intelligent and yet gentle childlike face drew my heart to him the moment I saw him and I was truly glad that fate had sent me such a neighbour. His whole soul was reflected in his handsome—one might almost say beautiful—face. His smile was so trusting, so artless and his large dark eyes so tender that when looking at him I always felt particular pleasure and even relief from my anguish. And I am not at all exaggerating. One day his eldest brother (he had five brothers of whom two were sent to work at some factory) had ordered him to take up his sabre and mount his horse. Reverence for the elders is so great among the mountain people that it never occurred to him to ask where they were going. The elder brothers, for their part, did not think it necessary to tell him anything. The purpose of their expedition was to rob a rich Armenian merchant on the highway. They waylaid the merchant, killed both him and his escorts, and seized his goods. When the robbery was discovered the six of them were seized, tried, and sent to hard labour in Siberia. The only mercy shown to Alei by the court was his lesser term of imprisonment—four years.

The brothers loved him with fatherly affection. He was their only consolation and though sad and grim themselves, they always smiled when looking at him. They had very little to say to him, as though they still regarded him as a child with whom nothing serious could be discussed, but when they did talk to him their faces would light up and I had the impression that they were chattering of something amusing, almost childish. I could see them exchanging glances and smiling lovingly as they listened to his answers. For his part, he revered them so greatly that he hardly dared to address them.

It was hard to imagine how this boy could have preserved such softness of heart, such unbending honesty, such warm understanding all through his years of imprisonment instead of growing callous and corrupt. But to this I ought to add that his nature was both well-balanced and firm in spite of his seeming gentleness, as I was afterwards to learn. He was as chaste as an innocent girl and all that was foul, cynical, shameful or unjust fired his fine eyes with indignation, making them finer still. Though no coward and well able to defend himself, he avoided quarrels and mutual tongue lashings and was the favourite of all. At first, he was merely polite to me. I talked to him more and more often; he learned to speak Russian quite well in a few months, something that his brothers were unable to achieve to the end of their terms. He was intelligent, modest, tactful, and capable of discussing many things. I may simply say that I thought him an exceptional human being and I always look back to my meeting with him as one of the best memories of my life. There are some natures so naturally good and richly endowed that the thought that they might deteriorate seems absurd. One never worries over them. I am not uneasy over Alei even now, Where can he be, I wonder?



One day, a long time after my arrival, I was lying on my bunk, troubled with painful thoughts. Though usually industrious, Alei was idle just then and it was too early for bed. The three brothers were observing a Moslem holiday and therefore not working. He too lay thinking, his hands clasped behind his head.

"You're very unhappy, I think," he said suddenly.

I looked at him with curiosity. I thought it was a strange thing for him to say. He was usually so tactful, so wise of heart. But then I saw such grief, such loneliness in his face that I understood that he too was wretched, and told him what I had divined.

He sighed and smiled one of those sad, tender smiles that I liked, the smile that showed two rows of pearly teeth which any woman could have envied.

"I'm sure, Alei, that you have been thinking about how they are celebrating the holiday at home in Daghestan."

"Yes." His eyes shone. "How did you know?"

"Oh, it's easy enough. It must be nice there."

"Ah, why do you say that?"

"What flowers they must have there! I imagine it must be like paradise."

"Ah, please don't talk about it." He was agitated.

"Have you a sister, Alei?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"She must be very beautiful if she is like you."

"Like me? Oh no. She is more beautiful than any girl in Daghestan. Ah, how beautiful is my sister! You've never seen anyone like her. My mother was very beautiful too."

"Was your mother fond of you?"

"Ah, what are you saying! She may have died of grief. I was her favourite son. She loved me more than my sister, more than all the others. Tonight, she came to me in a dream and cried over me."

He said nothing more that evening. But from that time he always sought my company, though he never spoke first out of a respect which I could not exactly understand. When I addressed him, he was happy. He often spoke about the Caucasus and his life there. His brothers did not forbid him to talk to me and even seemed pleased. When they saw that I, too, was attached to him more and more, they grew friendlier to me.

Alei often helped me with my work and did whatever he thought would be agreeable and would save me trouble. But there was not a shade of servility or personal motive in it, only his warm affection which he did not try to hide. He had an aptitude for handicrafts; he had learned to sew tolerably, to mend boots and could even do a little carpentry. His brothers encouraged him and prided in him.

"Why don't you learn to read and write Russian, Alei?" I said to him one day. "It might be useful to you in Siberia afterwards."

"I would like to very much, but who could teach me?"

"There are many who can. I will if you like."

"Ah, please do," he said pressing his hands to his breast and sitting up.

We began the very next evening. I had a Russian New Testament, the only book allowed. Alei learned to read in a few weeks without any other aids and within a few months he hardly ever faltered. He was eager to learn.

One day when we had read the whole of the Sermon on the Mount together, I noticed that he uttered some of the passages with great feeling and asked him if he liked them.

He glanced at me, his face flushed.

"Ah yes. Jesse is a holy prophet. He speaks the words of God. How beautiful!"

"But what is it that you like particularly?"

"Where he says: forgive, love and do not offend, love your enemies too. Ah, how well he speaks!"

He turned to his brothers who were listening and explained something to them with warmth. They talked together very solemnly for some time, nodding their heads. Then, with a grave and kindly Moslem smile—I liked it for its graveness alone—they assured me that Jesse was God's prophet and had wrought great wonders. He had created a bird out of clay into which he had breathed the breath of life so that it could fly away. That had been written in their books. They evidently thought that they would please me by praising Jesse and Alei was happy to see that his brothers were trying to be pleasant to me.

Alei was quick to learn to write too. He had bought paper—he would not allow me to buy it for him—also pen and ink and within a month or two he had learned to write. His brothers were impressed, and their pride and satisfaction knew no bounds; nor did they know how to show me enough gratitude. If we happened to be working together outside the prison, they would each try to help me, whenever they could. As for Alei, he seemed to feel as much affection for me as for his brothers. I shall never forget the day when he was set free. He took me to the passage behind the barrack, threw himself on my neck, and sobbed. He had never embraced me before or wept in my presence. "You have done so much for me," he said. "My father and mother could not have been kinder. You have made a man of me. God will reward you and I will never forget you."

Where is he now, my good, kind, dear Alei?

We also had a group of Poles in our barrack who kept to themselves and had little to do with the other convicts. I have already said that they were detested by all because of their exclusiveness and unconcealed loath-

ing for the Russian convicts. They were weary and tormented men; there were six of them. Some were educated and of these I shall speak later in greater detail. It was from them that I obtained books now and then in the last years of my imprisonment. I recall the queer, almost painful impression of the first book I read in prison. I'll talk about that afterwards too. It was a very strange impression, though difficult to explain, I fear. There are some things which are hard to judge unless one has experienced them.

There is only one thing I would like to mention now. The spiritual deprivations in prison are worse than the physical. A common man sent to hard labour finds himself in kindred society, perhaps in an even more enlightened society than he has been accustomed to. He has lost a good deal, of course. His native haunts, family, and so on, but otherwise his surroundings are much the same as they used to be. Now, a man of education who is condemned to the same punishment loses incomparably more. He must stifle all his needs and habits and descend to a sphere where the air is deficient—he is like a fish out of water—and his punishment turns out to be at least ten times more painful than it would be for the common man. This is true even if the change of habits alone is considered.

And so the Poles constituted a group of their own. There were six of them and they always kept together. The only one of the convicts they liked was our Jew and very probably simply because he amused them. But then, our Jew was liked by all the convicts, though everyone laughed at him. There was only one Jew among us and even now I cannot think of him without a smile. He always reminded me of Yankel in Gogol's *Taras Bulba*, who when undressed and ready to go to bed in something like a cupboard with his wife very much resembled a chicken. Isaiah Fomich did look like a plucked chicken.

He was an elderly man of about fifty, feeble and small of stature, cunning and yet stupid, bold and boastful, and yet cowardly. His face was covered with wrinkles and his forehead and cheeks scarred with the branding iron. I never understood how he could have survived the sixty rods which he received for murder. He carried upon his person a prescription which his Jewish friends got a doctor to make up for him immediately after the execution. The ointment prescribed could remove the brands on his face in less than a fortnight. He was afraid to try it in prison, however, and was waiting for the expiration of his twelve-year sentence, when he would become a Siberian settler. "If I don't do it I can't marry," he told me once. "And I certainly want to marry."

We were great friends. He was always in good spirits and never found life difficult. He was a jeweller by trade and was kept busy with orders from town where there was no jeweller's shop. For this, he was spared the heavy manual labour of the others. At the same time, he was a money-lender and all the convicts were his debtors. He had come to the prison before me and one of the Poles told me about his arrival in detail. It was quite a story and I will talk about it later.

As for the other prisoners, there were four Old Faith believers who were diligent readers of the bible, one of them the old man from Starodubye; two or three gloomy Ukrainians; a young convict with a thin little face and thin little nose who was twenty-three years old and had killed eight people, a group of counterfeits, one of whom was something like a self-appointed clown who kept the entire prison amused; and finally, several grim and sour-tempered characters shorn and scarred, silent and envious, lowering at everyone and determined to stay so as long as they were there. I had caught a glimpse of all this on that first joyless day of my arrival amid the

smoke, the foul oaths, the rattling of chains, insults, and brazen laughter. I stretched myself on the bare planks, my head resting on my coat, since I had not yet acquired a pillow, and covered myself with my sheepskin. But sleep would not come, though I was worn out and nearly broken by those monstrous impressions of the first day. Still, my new life was just beginning. A good deal lay in store for me which I had never conceived of, of which I had no forebodings.

## V

### FIRST MONTH

I was ordered to work three days after my arrival. I'll never forget that first day though there was nothing very striking about it, considering my position. Still, the first sensations are important. It was the time when I still regarded things with avid curiosity. I was greatly depressed in those first three days. This is the journey's end, I said to myself again and again. I'm in a convict prison now, here to stay for many years, an anchorage which I have reached raw-nerved and crushed. But who knows, when the time comes for me to leave in many years I may be sorry to go, I would add with something of that malicious enjoyment with which one touches a wound to feel the pain—as if consciousness of the full measure of my calamity gave me joy. The thought of regretting to leave such a place filled me with horror: I already sensed how monstrously pliable a man really is. Meanwhile, everything was hostile and frightening—or if not everything it naturally seemed so to me.

The wild curiosity with which my new companions regarded me, their exaggerated harshness towards a former nobleman who had come to join their company, a harshness verging on hatred, tormented me so that I

was impatient to get to work in order to fathom the full depth of my misfortune at once and to slip into the prison rut as quickly as possible. Of course, there were many things that I did not notice or suspect though they lay under my very nose; and I was not yet able to distinguish the good amid the evil. I should add, however, that I was much heartened by some good-humoured faces. The friendliest among them was Akim Akimovich and I soon noticed some kind and even gay expressions among the lowering faces of the others. "Bad people are to be found everywhere, but where there are bad people there must be good people as well," I consoled myself. "These people, perhaps, are no worse than *others* whom I had left behind." But I shook my head doubtfully as I thought this. And yet, how right I was!

There was the convict Sushilov, for instance, whom I did not know well until many years afterwards though he was constantly near me throughout my term. He is the man who comes to my mind first when I say that these people were no worse than others outside. He did various little jobs for me. There was also another prisoner named Osip whom Akim Akimovich had recommended soon after I arrived, saying that for thirty kopeks a month the man would cook separate meals for me if the prison food was distasteful to me and I could afford to buy my own. Osip was one of the four cooks chosen by the prisoners for our two mess barracks. They were at liberty to refuse this work whenever they pleased. The cooks did no other work but bake the bread and prepare the cabbage soup. They were dubbed the housewives, but without any offence meant or taken, because the men chosen for this job were an intelligent lot and as honest as could be expected. Osip had been consistently chosen for this job for many years and had never refused except when he got too bored and craved the old excitement of smuggling drink. He was a man

of rare honesty and gentleness, though he had been sent to prison for smuggling. He was that same tall sturdy smuggler whom I have already mentioned, faint-hearted about everything, especially the rods, peaceable, mild, kind to everybody, *never* indeed quarrelling with anybody, but unable to resist the temptation of smuggling in spite of all his cowardice. He traded in vodka like the other cooks, though not on such a scale as Gazin, whose daring he lacked. I got along very well with Osip and could easily afford those separate meals which cost only a ruble in silver a month. I ate the prison bread, of course, and occasionally the cabbage soup when I was especially hungry and could overcome my revulsion which later almost disappeared. I usually bought a pound of meat a day. The price was half a kopek in the winter. The marketing was done by one of the invalids assigned to keep the barracks in order. They assumed this duty of their own free will and charged only a trifle if anything at all. They had to do this for their own good, since they would have been given no rest otherwise. They used to bring tobacco, bars of pressed tea, meat, rolls, everything except spirits. They were not asked to bring vodka, though treated to a drink from time to time.

Osip kept cooking the meat for me for years on end. How well he managed it is another question, but that is not the point. The remarkable thing was that I scarcely exchanged a word with him in all that time. I tried to make him talk many times, but he seemed incapable of saying anything but yes or no or just smiling. He was a strange sight, this seven-year-old Hercules.

Sushilov, too, helped me. I had never asked him to, but he found me and attached himself to me I can hardly remember when and how. He began by doing my washing. There was a wash hole for this behind the barrack. The convicts washed their clothes in the troughs around



it. He also invented all sorts of other little services to do me. He made my tea, ran errands, found things for me, had my jacket mended, greased my boots four times a month, did everything with great zeal and pother as if his life depended on it. In short, he threw in his lot with mine and took all my cares unto himself. He would never say: "You have so and so many shirts and your jacket is torn," but, "*we* have so and so many shirts and *our* jacket is torn." He hovered about me devotedly as if that was his sole purpose in life. As he knew no trade whatever, his only source of income was what I gave him. Though I could afford very little, he was always pleased with what he received. He simply had to serve someone and he must have chosen me only because I seemed kinder and more honest than the others. He was one of those who could never get out of his straits and who were hired by the gamblers to watch in the passage all night at the rate of five kopeks with dire punishment to follow in case of negligence. I have mentioned this before. The chief trait of these people is to efface themselves before the others and play not merely second, but third and fourth fiddle. It was something inborn. Sushilov was a poor, meek man, quite inoffensive, even downtrodden, though no one had trampled upon him particularly. He was simply downtrodden by nature. I was always sorry for him somehow. I could not even look at him without pity and why I really did not know. It was impossible to talk to him because he had nothing to say. Whenever I tried, he would be ill at ease and would visibly brighten the moment I thought up some errand to send him away. Finally, I grew certain that this gave him pleasure. He was neither tall nor short, neither handsome nor ugly, neither stupid nor intelligent, neither young nor old, slightly pock-marked and rather fair-haired. There was absolutely nothing definite about him, except one thing: he evidently belonged to

the company of Sirotkin, but solely because he was naturally meek and downtrodden. The convicts often ridiculed him mainly because he had *changed* during his march to Siberia for a red shirt and a ruble in silver. It was too funny to think that he should have sold himself for such a pitiful price. To *change* means to take the name of another prisoner and, consequently, to accept his sentence. Strange as it may seem, such things happened even in my time in Siberian prisoners' convoys, were hallowed by the traditions and defined by settled forms. I refused to believe it at first, but had to, finally, because of what I saw.

This is how the *change* is effected. A group of prisoners is marching to Siberia. They are prisoners of all kinds: some condemned to hard labour, others to labour in the mines or simply to exile as settlers. Somewhere on the way, in Perm Gubernia for instance, a certain Mikhailov, condemned to hard labour for capital offence, decides to change with another man, since he does not like the prospect of spending long years as a convict. A shrewd, worldly-wise man, he will know what to do. He looks for some meek and simple fellow who has received a less severe sentence: a few years in the mine, exile as a settler or a short term of hard labour. At last he happens upon such a man as Sushilov, a former serf sentenced to exile as a settler. The poor man has already travelled fifteen hundred versts on foot without a kopek in his pocket, because such as he can never have a kopek and is trudging along, completely worn out—subsisting on prison rations alone, with nothing to wear but his convict's clothes, performing services for everybody for a few coppers. Mikhailov talks to him and even makes friends with him, eventually getting him drunk and inducing him to agree to the change. "My name is Mikhailov," he will say, "and I'm going to a special section of hard labour. It's hard labour, of

course, but must be better or why would it be called 'special'?"

This special section was something that many people even of the official world in St. Petersburg did not know anything about. It was a small corner of its own in Siberia. The prisoners there were so few (there were less than seventy in my time) that they were too difficult to trace. I have since met people who have served in Siberia and know the country well, but have never heard of the special section. Only six lines about this institution may be found in the penal code. "Attached to the convict prison of— is a special section reserved for the most dangerous criminals pending the establishment in Siberia of especially heavy penal labour undertakings." Even the prisoners of this special section did not know whether they had been brought there for life or a term of years. There was no mention of the word term in the penal code; what was said was only: pending the establishment of heavy penal undertakings.

It was not surprising, therefore, that neither Sushilov nor anyone of the party not excluding Mikhailov knew anything about it. All the latter knew was that it could be nothing good judging by his crime for which he had already received four thousand strokes. Now, Sushilov had only been sentenced to exile. What could be better under the circumstances?

"What about changing?" Mikhailov would ask. And Sushilov, slightly tipsy and bursting with gratitude for the kindness of his companion, would feel that he simply could not refuse. Besides, he had heard about such exchanges before, so there could not be anything extraordinary about it. An agreement was soon reached. Taking advantage of Sushilov's simplicity, the cunning Mikhailov bought Sushilov's name for a red shirt and a silver ruble handed to him in the presence of witnesses. Sushilov would sober up somewhat on the next

day, but he plied with drink again. In any event, he could not go back on his bargain because the ruble had gone for drink and the shirt followed in a short time. If he had changed his mind, he was duty bound to return both shirt and money. Where, indeed, was he to get a ruble? Yet give it back he must, since the company would not allow him to break his word otherwise. The convicts felt strongly about such things. Promises had to be kept. If he did not stick to the bargain, they would be sure to make his life a hell. They might beat him, threaten him or even kill him.

Were the company ever to show leniency, exchange would come to an end. If the pledge could be broken after the money had been paid who would ever keep his word again? It was a social matter, in short, and the convict parties would never tolerate any violation.

Sushilov saw that he could not go back on his word and resigned himself to the situation. Every man of the convoy was informed of the bargain. Gifts and drink were distributed if necessary to buy the silence of some. What did they care whether Mikhailov or Sushilov went to the devil! They drank their vodka and held their tongues. The roll would perhaps be called at the next stage: "Mikhailov!" "Here!" Sushilov would answer. "Sushilov!" "Here!" Mikhailov would answer. There was nothing more to say about it. The convicts were sorted at Tobolsk. And Mikhailov would go to comparative liberty in exile and Sushilov to the special section, escorted by an armed convoy. All protest was useless then. How could he prove that he was not who they thought he was? How many years would the case drag on if he tried? And with what results? Where were the witnesses? Even if they could be found, they would deny everything. And so, Sushilov had come to be in the special section for a silver ruble and a shirt.

The convicts laughed at the man not so much because

he had agreed to change, though they were scornful of the fools who exchanged a light sentence for a heavy one, but mostly because he had received nothing for the bargain except a shirt and a ruble, a ridiculous price. Such exchanges were usually made for relatively large sums, sometimes for twenty or thirty rubles or more. Sushilov, however, was even too weak-spined and insignificant to be laughed at.

Sushilov and I got on together in this manner for a long time and he gradually grew very devoted to me. I could not help noticing this and grew attached to him in turn. But one day, and I shall never forgive myself for it, he had failed to carry out some errand for me though he had been paid to do so and I had been cruel enough to say: "You've taken the money, Sushilov, but you haven't done what you were told." To this, he said nothing and went off about my order, but was very sad for two days. I could not believe that my words had affected him so badly. I knew that a convict by the name of Vasilyev was pressing him for a trifling debt. Perhaps he needed the money, but was afraid to ask me for it. "You were going to ask me for some money to pay Anton Vasilyev," I suggested. "Well, here it is." Sushilov stood before me as I sat on a bunk. He seemed to be stunned for a moment. He could hardly believe that I had remembered his difficult position and was offering him some money, especially since he had already received some money from me in advance and could hardly hope I'd give him more. He looked at the money, then at me, turned and went out. Much surprised, I followed him and found him behind the barrack. He was standing with his face against the stockade, his arm resting on one of its stakes.

"What is the matter, Sushilov?" I asked.

He would not look at me and, to my surprise, I saw that he was on the verge of tears.

"You think that I work for you for the money, Alexander Petrovich," he said in a trembling voice, still trying to avoid my look. "But I... I really—"

He turned towards the stockade so abruptly that he bumped his head and suddenly he began to sob. It was the first time I had seen a man weep in the convict prison. I found it difficult to soothe him and though he began to look after me even more zealously if that were possible I could see by barely perceptible signs that he would never forgive my reproach. And yet others taunted him cruelly, swore at him and badgered him in every way—and he lived at peace with them and never took offence. It is not easy to know some man even after long years of association.

That is why the convict prison could not appear in the same light to me at first as it did many years later; that is why, too, I have said that though I observed everything with avid curiosity, I was not yet in a position to see many things that stared me in the face. It was only the biggest, most conspicuous things that caught my attention at first, but even these perhaps produced a faulty impression and merely filled me with haunting despair. What contributed to this most of all was my meeting with A-v who came to the prison a short time before me and poisoned the first days of my life there. I had known before that I would meet A-v.

I feel I must say a few words about this man.

He was the living example of the last degree of degradation, the most loathsome example of the depth to which a human being can sink and the degree to which one can kill, with remorseless ease, every kind of moral feeling in oneself. Young A-v was once a nobleman—I have said before that he was friendly with Fedka and retailed to the major all that happened in the barrack. And here is his story in brief: Arrived in St. Petersburg, having failed to finish his studies and after a quar-

rel with his parents who were horrified by his debauchery, he had turned informer for the sake of money. In other words, he had not hesitated to sell the lives of ten people to satisfy his craving for the grossest pleasures. Excited by St. Petersburg with its brilliant confectionery shops and houses of ill fame, he sank so low that, though not unintelligent, he did a hare-brained and senseless thing. He slandered some, deceived others, and ended with a sentence of ten years of hard labour in Siberia. He was still quite young and one might have thought that his terrible misfortune would have caused some reaction and brought about a crisis. Actually, he accepted his new status without embarrassment or even revulsion. His moral feelings were not troubled. He was troubled by nothing but the prospect of labour and of parting with the confectionery shops and the three Meshchanskaya streets of ill fame. He even felt that his status of convict had given him licence for fresh outrages and treacheries. "I'm a convict now and can be as bad as I like," he must have reasoned. This vile creature was a monster of course. I have lived among murderers, libertines, and avowed scoundrels for many years but am certain that I never saw another instance of such complete moral degradation and arrogant viciousness. There was the parricide whom I have mentioned, but even he, according to many indications, was better and more humane than A-v. All through my term, A-v was nothing more in my eyes than a mass of flesh with teeth and a stomach and a craving for the grossest gratification of the senses. If only he could cover the traces, he was ready to kill in cold blood or do anything to indulge his least and most capricious pleasures. I knew the man very well and am not exaggerating. He was the extreme to which the physical side of a man could go if unrestrained by some inner law. His everlasting sneer was sickening. He was a moral Quasimodo. To this one

should add that he was sly and clever, good-looking, had a smattering of education and some abilities. No, better the plague, famine, and general holocaust than the presence of such a man in human society!

I have already said that there were many informers in the prison and that the convicts did not at all object to them. On the contrary, they were more friendly with A-v than with us. His relations with the drunken major gave him a certain importance in their eyes. A-v had assured the major that he was a portrait painter—while he equally assured the convicts that he had been an officer of the Guards. The major, accordingly, had ordered that he should be sent to his house to paint his portrait. And that was how he made the acquaintance of Fedka who exercised astonishing influence over his master and consequently over all the convicts. A-v informed against us on the major's orders. But the major, when he was drunk, used to slap his face and call him a spy. After such a scene, he might fall back in his chair and ask A-v to go on with his portrait. He was certain that A-v was an excellent painter, almost the equal of Bryullov of whom even he had heard. Still, he thought himself authorized to slap the man's face because he was a convict. Even if A-v were a thousand times Bryullov, he, the major, was the chief and could do what he liked. He made A-v help him to remove his boots and take away the chamber-pots. Yet, for a long time he could not dismiss the thought that A-v was a great artist. The sittings went on for a year until the major guessed that he had been duped. He could see that the portrait, far from reaching conclusion, was every day losing what little likeness it had to himself. He then gave the artist a beating and put him to the hardest work. A-v, of course, was sorry to part with his long days of idleness, the tit-bits from the major's table, his crony Fedka, and the



treats the two of them had contrived for themselves in the major's kitchen.

When A-v fell into disgrace, the major at last stopped persecuting M., the convict whom A-v had particularly slandered for the following reason: when A-v first arrived, M. was very lonely and kept to himself, horrified and disgusted by the convicts and refusing to see anything in them that could conciliate him. They repaid him in kind. Generally speaking, people like M. were in a dreadful position in prison. M. did not know what A-v had been sentenced for. The latter, for his part, at once perceived with whom he was dealing and assured him that he had been sent there on a very different charge, almost the same as that of M., who was, of course, overjoyed to meet a man of his own mind. He attached himself to A-v, did all he could to console him in his first days of misfortune, which he thought to have been unbearably hard for A-v, gave him what money he had left, fed him and shared all his things with him. A-v at once began to hate him for his very big-heartedness, his aversion to anything that was base and his total difference from himself. At the first opportunity, he told the major everything that M. had confided to him. The major, in turn, persecuted M. furiously and if not for the commandant's influence would have driven him to some desperate action. When this betrayal became known, A-v was not at all put out, but on the contrary he seemed to like meeting M. and smiled at him maliciously. He must have got some peculiar pleasure from this. M., in fact, drew my attention to this several times.

This human offal eventually attempted to escape in the company of another convict and the soldier in charge. Of this I will talk later on.

In the first days, he tried to curry favour with me as well, thinking that I did not know his past. Yes, I was driven nearly to despair by him in the first days of my

imprisonment. I was horrified to find myself in such a slough of baseness and cowardice and thought that everyone here had sunk the depths of A-v. But I was wrong; I should not have judged the others by him.

In the first three days I did nothing but wander miserably about the prison or lie on my bunk. I ordered some shirts to be sewn of the coarse linen issued to me from a prisoner recommended to me by Akim Akimovich, at so and so many kopeks a shirt. On his advice, too, I had also acquired a folding mattress made of canvas stuffed with felt and as thin as a pancake and a pillow stuffed with flocks and dreadfully hard to my unaccustomed head. Akim Akimovich had taken great trouble in helping me to get the things I needed and with his own hands made a blanket for me out of bits of old clothes, of trousers and coats which the prisoners sold me. The clothing issued to the prisoners became their personal property when worn out and could always be sold no matter in what state. I was surprised at this. Many things were surprising, as this was my first contact with the common people. And suddenly I realized that I was one of the common people myself, a convict like any of them. Their habits, ideas and opinions had to become mine, legally and formally at any rate, even if I did not share them in the least. I was as astonished as if I had never known of this, though I certainly did hear about it before. Reality is always different from hearsay. How could I have ever guessed that cast-offs had some value? Yet here I was gathering them to have a blanket made. It was difficult to define the material that was used for the clothes of the convicts. It looked somewhat like the thick wool of the army's uniforms. But when it was slightly worn, it grew threadbare and tore with abominable ease. The clothes made of this stuff were supposed to last a year, but even that was too long. What with work and shouldering heavy burdens, they

were soon worn to shreds. Sheepskins were issued for a period of three years and served as coat, blanket, and even mattress. They were more durable, of course, but often enough they were patched with sackings by the end of the third year. Even then, it was possible to sell them for forty kopeks in silver, while those best preserved drew sixty or even seventy kopeks—vast sums for the convict prison.

As I have said before, money exercised great power in prison. There can be no doubt that the prisoner who had no money suffered ten times more than the one who had, though the former too was issued everything that he needed and could do without money, as the authorities claimed. But I repeat that had the prisoners really been prevented from having money, they would have lost their reason or would have died like flies “with everything they needed” or would have finally gone in for monstrous crimes—some out of sheer boredom, others in the hope of being annihilated somehow or changing their lot, as they themselves put it. If the convict squandered the kopeks he had earned by the sweat of his brow or by devious scheming, often involving theft and trickery, like a wilful child, it did not at all prove that he cared nothing for money, as some might conjecture. The convict was greedy for money to the point of convulsion, to the point of madness. If he tossed it away, he did so to obtain that which was more valuable still. Now, what could be dearer than money to a convict? Freedom or the dream of freedom, and all convicts are great dreamers. I shall deal with this later. But speaking of dreams. Convicts who had been sentenced to *twenty* years said to me casually: “When my term is over, God granting, I—” The very meaning of the word “prisoner” is: a man who has lost his freedom. But when he is spending money he is exercising *his freedom of will* in spite of his branded brow, his fetters,

and the hateful stakes shutting out God's world and fencing him in like a wild beast. He is able to procure vodka which is strictly forbidden and other delights; sometimes he can even bribe the invalid or even the sergeant and make them close their eyes to his violations of the rules; more than that, he can even crow over them, something that he likes more than anything else, and, in short, he can *if for a time* persuade his comrades and even himself that he has more freedom and power than he seems to have. He can go on a grand spree, bully and bluster if only to show them that he *can* do even this. He tries to convince himself of what he knows to be impossible, of what he could not hope to dream of at other times. This explains why even the staidest prisoner had a penchant for swagger and pathetic exaggeration of his own spectral personality. Finally, there is an element of risk in the grand fling, an element which evoked a semblance of life and a faint wraith of freedom. And what would man not give for freedom! What millionaire would not sacrifice all his millions for one breath of air if there were a rope round his neck?

The authorities could never understand why a prisoner who had lived quietly for years and had even been promoted to barrack elder for exemplary conduct would suddenly go off the deep end without rhyme or reason, raising a tumult, wreaking general mischief, and even committing a crime: he would insult the prison functionaries, or kill someone, or attack some woman. Everyone would be amazed. Yet the cause of this unexpected outburst was the passionate longing to assert his personality, the frenzied clamour for himself, for his downtrodden self suddenly aroused to a fit of frenzy, madness, convulsions. So, perhaps, a man buried alive and awakening in his coffin hammers on its lid and struggles to wrest it off, though his reason might persuade him that all his efforts are useless. The whole

point is that reason does not enter here, but only the convulsions. It should also be noted that every expression of will in a convict is regarded as a crime, so that it does not at all matter whether it is a strong or a weak expression. If there is to be a spree, then let there be a spree, if a risk then a risk even if it leads to murder. It's only the first step that is difficult. Once a man runs riot there is no holding him. It is better not to drive him to such extremes. Everybody will be the happier for it.

That may be so, but how is it to be done?

## VI

### FIRST MONTH

I had a small sum of money when I arrived, but carried little of it on my person, afraid that it might be confiscated. I had put several rubles in the binding of my bible, the only book allowed. The book with the money pasted into it had been presented to me in Tobolsk by people who had been in exile for decades\* and regarded every unfortunate as a brother.

In Siberia there are and, most likely, always will be people who deem that it is their life's work to aid the unfortunates and show zealous and disinterested sympathy for them as though they were their own children.

I cannot forget one meeting I had in the town where our prison was situated. There was a lady who lived there, a widow by the name of Nastasya Ivanovna. None of the convicts, of course, knew her personally. It seemed to be the object of her life to come to the assistance

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\* Reference is to Muravyova, Annenkova, and Fonvizina, who followed their husbands sentenced to hard labour for participation in the December uprising against the tsarist government. Dostoyevsky met them in Tobolsk on his way to Omsk.—*Ed.*

of all the exiles and especially of us, the convicts. Perhaps she had had some misfortune in her family; perhaps someone near and dear to her had been sent to exile or prison. In any event, she was happy to do what she could for us. True, she could do little because she was poor, but we all felt that we had a devoted friend somewhere outside. She often sent us news, which was important since we had no other means of learning anything. When I left the prison and was going to another town, I managed to call on her and make her acquaintance. She lived in the suburbs with a near relation and turned out to be neither old nor young, neither plain nor good-looking. I could not tell whether or not she was intelligent or educated, but I sensed infinite kindness in all that she did, a fervent desire to do good, to console and ease our lot. This was revealed in her tranquil, kindly eyes.

I spent an evening at her house with a fellow convict. She anticipated our every movement, laughed when we laughed, agreed with whatever we said, and could not be hospitable enough. She served us tea and sweets and I had the impression that if she had had thousands of rubles, she would have been glad to have them only to entertain us better and relieve our comrades in prison. As we were about to leave, she fetched two cigarette-cases and gave one to each of us to remember her by. She had made them herself, pasting them together (God knows how) out of cardboard and covering them with coloured paper of the kind with which schoolboys' textbooks are covered (perhaps the paper really had been taken from the cover of some arithmetic primer). To make them look nicer, she had pasted, around the rim, a thin strip of gilt paper for which she had probably gone specially to a shop. "They may be useful to you, since you smoke," she said timidly, as if excusing herself for such a gift. I have heard and read that love of one's

neighbour is only another form of selfishness. But what selfishness could there possibly have been here?

Though I had very little money, I could not, for some reason, feel seriously annoyed over those convicts who, after having deceived me once, naïvely came to borrow a second, a third and even a fourth time. But I must frankly admit that what did annoy me was the thought that all these people with their childlike knavery must have taken me for a fool and laughed up their sleeves because I had lent them money for the fifth time. They were sure to think that they had taken me in with their ruses. I am certain that they would have had a far better opinion of me if I had refused and sent them away. Yet, I could not refuse. I was annoyed mainly because I was anxious to decide on what terms I should be with them. I realized that the life here was quite new to me and that I was groping in the dark and that one could not live in such a state for many years. I decided, therefore, to be guided by my conscience and feelings. At the same time, I also knew this was only a maxim and that the most unexpected things might happen in practice.

That is why anguish gnawed at my heart more and more painfully despite the distracting cares which I had taken on myself mainly on Akim Akimovich's advice. "The dead house," I would say to myself as I stood on the steps of our barrack, looking through the twilight at the convicts who had just returned from work and were strolling about the yard, from the barrack to the kitchen and back again. I tried to guess what sort of men they were. They would slouch about, some frowning, others too gay—these two kinds are the most frequent and in character with prison life—quarrelling or talking, or walking alone seemingly lost in thought, some weary and apathetic, others with an air of superiority (even here!), their hats at a rakish angle, their sheepskins slung loosely over their shoulders, insolence in their

eyes and mockery on their lips. This was my world now, the place where I had to live, whether I liked it or not.

I tried to question Akim Akimovich about the convicts. I liked to take my tea with him for the sake of company (I lived almost on tea alone at the beginning). Akim Akimovich was always glad to have tea with me and himself took the trouble to heat our funny little home-made tea-kettle lent to me by M. Akim Akimovich would drink one glass—he actually owned several glasses—with silent dignity, would thank me and at once go to work on my blanket. He could not tell me what I wanted to know and could not even understand why I should be interested in the convicts. He regarded me with a humorous, quizzical smile which I remember to this day. I realized that I would have to discover things for myself.

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On the fourth day, the convicts were drawn up in two rows before the guardhouse near the prison gate—just as on the morning when I was taken to have my fetters changed. Soldiers with loaded rifles and fixed bayonets stood before and behind them. The soldier has the right to fire if a convict attempts to escape. On the other hand, he may be held responsible for his shot if there was no actual necessity for it. The same rule holds for mutiny. But who would think of trying to escape openly?

An officer of the Engineers arrived attended by the convoy chief and the supervising sergeants and soldiers. The roll was called and the convicts who were assigned to the tailor shops were the first to march off. These were quite independent of the Engineers since they were employed only in making clothing for the convicts. The next party was assigned to the workshops, and a third to heavy, rough work. There were twenty of the latter, myself among them. Two barges which belonged to the government stood on the frozen river behind the prison. They were to be dismantled so that the timber should



not be entirely lost. But the timber was worth next to nothing, since firewood could be had for very little in this forest town. The work was invented only to keep us busy and the convicts knew this very well; tasks such as this were always done reluctantly and lazily. It was a different matter when the work was really needed and the tasks could be fixed. Though not paid for this work either, they were always heartened by it and strained every effort, as I have seen for myself, to get it done well and as quickly as possible. I could see that they even took pride in it. On that day, however, the work was done merely as a matter of form. No definite tasks could be asked for and we simply had to go on working up to the drum beat that called us back at eleven o'clock. It was a warm, misty day, the snow was all but thawing. Our group trudged towards the river, the chains beneath our clothes clinking sharply at every step. Two or three men went off to get the tools from the depot. I trudged on with the others and actually felt a certain excitement, wondering what sort of work we should have to do, what hard labour was like, and how I would manage it for the first time in my life.

I remember everything to the smallest details. When we passed a bearded townsman on the way, he stopped and thrust his hand into his pocket. One of the prisoners then separated from our party, took off his hat, received the alms—five kopeks—and quickly returned. The townsman crossed himself and continued on his way. The five kopeks went to buy rolls which were equally shared among us.

Some of our group were taciturn and gloomy, others indifferent and sluggish, and still others chatting listlessly. But one man was very gay, heaven knows why! He sang and almost danced, rattling his chains at every pace. It was the same stocky little convict who had quarrelled over the waterbarrel with the man who had

declared that he was a gaol-bird. The little man's name was Skuratov.

Finally, he started a dashing song of which I remember only the refrain:

*They married me without me  
When I was at the mill.*

All we lacked was a balalaika.

Some of the prisoners were instantly resentful of his extraordinary good humour and even took it as an insult.

"What's he howling about!" grumbled one of the convicts, though it was not at all clear how this concerned him.

"The wolf only had one song, but even that was stolen by this Tula man," remarked another in a sombre Ukrainian accent.

"I am from Tula," retorted Skuratov, "but we, at least, do not stuff ourselves with dumplings as you do in your Poltava."

"Is that what they do in Poltava? But what did you eat? Scooped up your soup with a bast shoe!"

"And now you've grown a belly!" another put in.

"I am a pampered sort of a person, my friends," said Skuratov with a gentle sigh, as though reproaching himself for this failing. "I've been batted on plums and cream cakes since childhood (that is, fattened. Skuratov deliberately misused his words). My brothers run a large business in Moscow even now. They're wholesale dealers in wind and doing a brisk trade."

"You were also in trade?"

"In various ways, yes. Here's how I earned my first two hundred."

"Two hundred?" somebody echoed fascinated by the figure.

"Yes, a clear two hundred, my dear. Not rubles, but strokes! Luka, I say, Luka!"

"I may be Luka to some, but to you I'm Luka Kuzmich!" grumbled a thin convict with a pointed little nose.

"So be it Kuzmich, you son-of-a-bitch!"

"I may be Kuzmich to some, but I'm Uncle Kuzmich to you."

"To the devil with you, uncle. I wanted to tell you something nice, but I won't now. And so, brothers, it came to be that I had to leave Moscow in a hurry. They gave me fifteen strokes as a parting gift and sent me off."

"But what for?" asked a convict who had been listening attentively.

"I broke quarantine, went billiarding, and drank too much and that's what kept me from making a fortune. And wouldn't I have loved to get rich! I wanted to get rich something awful."

Some laughed at this. Skuratov was evidently one of those jolly men, or rather clowns, who were always busy trying to keep his graver companions amused and receiving nothing in exchange but insults. He belonged to a peculiar type of convict of whom I shall say more later on.

"Even now you are worth shooting for the skinning, like a sable," said Luka Kuzmich. "Just look at his clothes, they're worth at least a hundred rubles."

Skuratov wore the oldest and greasiest sheepskin patched and mended all over. He examined himself carefully but somewhat indifferently.

"It's my head that's worth money," he said. "When I said good-bye to Moscow, I was not too sorry because I was sure that my head was to stay on my shoulders and make the journey with me. 'Good-bye, Moscow,' I said. 'Thank you for the nice striped hide you gave me.' So my sheepskin doesn't matter, you see. You needn't look at it."

"Then what should we look at, your head?"

"His head doesn't belong to him either," Luka Kuzmich persisted. "It was given to him in charity when they passed Tumen."

"Did you ever learn a trade, Skuratov?"

"What did he need a trade for? He was a blind beggars' guide and stole their coppers as he led them about," said one of the scowling convicts.

"I did have a trade, nuptually! I tried to make shoes," answered Skuratov with dignity ignoring the caustic remark altogether. "But I never got beyond the first pair."

"Did you sell it?"

"Well, there was a fellow who did not fear God or obey his father and mother; and so God punished him by making him buy my shoes."

There was a rumble of laughter.

"Then I tried to do the same thing here," Skuratov went on very gravely. "I resoled a pair for Stepan Fyodorich, our lieutenant in charge."

"Was he satisfied?"

"No. He swore at me and kicked me. I think he was annoyed. Oh, what a life! What a swindle it is!"

*And before I knew what was up  
Akulina's husband t-u-r-r-ned up...*

he suddenly bawled and began to tap out the rhythm with his fettered feet.

"Foolish man!" muttered the Ukrainian at my side with a sidelong glare at Skuratov.

"Altogether useless man," said another in a final and decisive tone.

I could not see why everyone was so irritated with Skuratov. Why did they despise those convicts who were light-hearted and gay? I set the Ukrainian's anger down to personal dislike, but was wrong. They were angry with him because he seemed devoid of that affected

dignity with which the entire prison was infected to the point of pedantry. That was what they meant by calling him an altogether useless man. They did not, however, treat all of the gay prisoners as they did Skuratov. If the man was simple-hearted and good-natured, they would, surprisingly enough, humiliate him at once. But there were others of the gay sort who would stand no nonsense and were, therefore, handled with care. I particularly remember one of the truculent pranksters who was a lively and pleasant man at bottom—as I afterwards learned. He was a tall sturdy man with a wart on his cheek and a comic expression on his face which was not devoid of good looks and intelligence. He was commonly called “the sapper,” having served in the Engineers’ Corps, and now belonged to the special section. I shall say a few words about him later on.

Not all of the grimmer convicts, however, were as carping as the Ukrainian who could not bear to see people gay. There were men among them who craved to dominate the others, certain that they were more skilful, resourceful, strong-willed, and intelligent. Many of them were really intelligent and strong of will and actually achieved an ascendancy and considerable influence over their comrades. They often hated one another and each had many ill-wishers. Still, they treated the other convicts with dignified condescension, never quarrelling with them, keeping in the good books of the authorities, and unofficially directing the work outside the prison. None of these would have descended to reproaching a man for his singing—they did not stoop to such trifles. They were always very polite to me, but never too friendly—as this, too, apparently seemed undignified to them. I shall enlarge on this company too if I have the chance.

We reached the river at last. We could see the old hulk we were to dismantle held fast in the ice below.

The bluish steppes fell away in the distance on the other bank. It was a desolate sight. I had expected that everyone would at once fall to work, but nothing of the sort happened. Some sat on the logs scattered over the bank and nearly all reached into their top-boots for their pouches filled with the local tobacco which was sold for three kopeks a pound at the market. Each man produced his stumpy home-made pipe and lit up, while the soldiers stood around watching with infinite boredom.

"And who the devil decided to dismantle that old hulk?" said one of the convicts to no one in particular. "Aren't there enough sticks lying around?"

"It was thought up by those who don't care what we think."

"Now where can those yokels be going?" asked the first without heeding the answer of the other when he noticed a crowd of peasants advancing over the virgin snow in single file. All turned leisurely to look and exchange witticisms more from boredom than anything else. The last peasant in the line was walking in a rather comical way with arms outspread and his head to one side. He wore a high peaked peasant's cap and his figure stood out clearly against the snow.

"Just see how our good brother Petrovich has bundled himself up," someone remarked, mimicking a peasant's accent. Strangely enough, the convicts were contemptuous of the peasants, though at least half of them had once been peasants themselves.

"The last one walks as if he were sowing radishes."

"Seems to be a hard-thinking bloke with pots of money," a third observed.

They all laughed, but without animation, as if even this were too much of an effort.

A brisk, lively woman came up to sell us some rolls. We at once spent the five kopeks which had been given to us and divided the rolls equally.

The young convict who usually sold rolls in prison bought about two dozen and bickered hard to get three rolls gratis instead of the usual two. The woman would not give in.

"Well, if I can't have that extra roll, I'll have something else!"

"What else?"

"The thing that mice don't eat."

"May your tongue fall off for that!" the wench shrieked and laughed.

At last, the sergeant appeared carrying his swagger-cane.

"What are you sitting about for? Begin at once!"

"Give us a stint of task, Ivan Matveich," said one of the volunteer foremen as he slowly got up.

"Why didn't you speak up at the roll-call? Take that hulk to pieces, that's your stint!"

The convicts arose and shuffled slowly to the edge of the frozen river. Several in the crowd began to volunteer directions. The hulk was not to be torn down at random. The timber and especially the beams held by wooden nails were to be left intact. It was a long and tedious job.

"The first thing we must do is to draw that beam out. Well, come on!" called a simple workman who had not set himself up as a foreman at all, but was a quiet, timid youngster. He bent down, embracing a heavy beam, and waited for someone to help. No one responded, however.

"He wants to lift it. Even his grandfather, the bear, could not do that," muttered someone.

"Well then, how else should we begin, I really don't know," said the young enthusiast, somewhat put out as he let go of the beam and straightened.

"There's always more work that one can do, so what are you so anxious about?"

"He would miscount even three chickens if he had to feed them, but here he wants to be the first."

"Why, brothers, I didn't really mean anything! I just wanted..." the young man murmured apologetically.

"Am I to put you in cold storage for the winter or in dust-covers to keep you warm?" shouted the sergeant somewhat puzzled by his helpless team of twenty. "Get to work at once!"

"Saying at once doesn't make it at once, Ivan Matveich."

"But you're not doing anything at all! Hey, Chatterer Petrovich. What are you standing there for, casting your eyes about? Are they for sale? Begin at once."

"What can I do all by myself?"

"You'd better give us a stint, Ivan Matveich."

"I've told you that I won't. First dismantle the ship and then you may go home. Come on!"

The convicts began to work at last, but they did it slowly, awkwardly and reluctantly. It was even disconcerting to see this large group of sturdy workmen who seemed at a loss how to go about the task. They tried to raise the smallest beam, but curiously enough, it broke in their hands "of itself," as they explained to the sergeant. Obviously they would have to change their method. An endless discussion ensued, passing into jibes, insults, and threatening to end in something worse. The sergeant shouted again, flourishing his swagger-cane. But the second beam broke like the first. It was then agreed that there were not enough axes and two convicts went off under escort to get more, while the others sat quietly down on the beams, took out their pipes and again began to smoke.

The sergeant, finally, spat with contempt. "There's little chance that you'll kill yourselves working. What a crowd!" he grumbled and went off to the fortress flourishing his cane.



The superintendent arrived in an hour, heard what the convicts had to say and declared that the task he would set them was to extract four beams unbroken and dismantle a considerable section of the ship besides, after which they could go home. The assignment was no little one, but good heavens! How they went to work now! What had become of their laziness and awkwardness? The axes began to fly and the wooden pins were quickly wrenched out. The levers of long poles were seized by twenty pairs of hands and the beams came off unbroken and intact much to my surprise. The work proceeded at a terrific rate. Everyone suddenly grew very intelligent. There was no more bickering and each man seemed to know just when to act and when to advise. The task was done half an hour before the drum beat and the convicts went home tired, but quite pleased, though all that they had gained was half an hour. As for myself, I noticed one thing. Whenever I tried to help, I was always out of place and they would drive me away almost swearing. Some wretched ragamuffin who was the worst workman and who would never have dared to speak up before the other convicts, all of them more intelligent and skilful than he, could now shout at me, claiming that I was in the way and interfering with the work. The most forward of them finally said to me quite bluntly: "What are you doing here, anyway? Why push in where you're not wanted?"

"You're in a rare stew!" added another. "You'd do better to take a plate and go a begging for alms to build a new church."

I finally had to stand away from them, though ashamed to be idle while the others were working. But when I went to the other side of the barge to get out of their way, they shouted: "That's the sort of workers they've sent to help us. We'll never get anything done with such help!"

It was all a game, of course, a game which everyone

enjoyed. They could not miss the opportunity to crow over a former nobleman. This attitude will perhaps explain why my first anxious thought in prison was how to get on with these people. I knew that there would be many such incidents, but decided to stick to the plan I had already thought out. I would try to be simple and independent. I would by no means seek their friendship, yet would not spurn them if they tried to be friendly with me. I must not be afraid of their threats and hatred and ignore it as far as possible. I must not resign myself to their habits and customs, nor try to assume their tone. I was sure that they would only despise me for this if I did. As I learned afterwards, they had even expected me to stand on what they understood to be the dignity of an aristocrat, that is: adopt pained airs and graces, be squeamish of them, be full of genteel sneers and keep my hands superbly white. They would, of course, have ribbed me very badly, but secretly respected me. As it happened, I had never lived up to that conception and was not going to begin now. In any event, I was determined to sacrifice neither my education nor my mode of thinking. If I were to pander to them, agree with them on all things, grow over-familiar and adopt their "qualities" to win them over, they would be certain that I was doing it out of fear and would hold me in contempt. A-v's example proved nothing at all. He went to the major often and they were afraid of him. On the other hand, I did not want to withdraw into chilly politeness as the Poles did.

Just now, the convicts were contemptuous of me because I had tried to work instead of putting on airs and graces, and though I was sure that they would eventually change their opinion, the thought that they might have interpreted my efforts as an attempt to ingratiate myself with them was depressing.

When I returned to the barrack that evening, tired and dissatisfied, a great sadness took possession of me again.

How many thousands of days had I to pass like this, and all of them exactly alike! I was still tramping up and down behind the barracks as twilight fell when I suddenly saw Sharik, our prison dog, bounding towards me. A mascot, much like the dog of a platoon or regiment, he had been in prison for a long time, belonged to no one in particular, regarded everyone as his master and lived on the scraps from the kitchen. He was a large, black dog spotted with white, had wise eyes and a bushy tail. No one petted or paid the least attention to him. I made friends with him on the day I arrived by giving him a piece of bread. Whenever I stroked him, he stood still, looking at me lovingly and wagging his tail. He had been sniffing everywhere among the other prisoners for me, the first man to pet him in many years, and now threw himself upon me whining. Just what happened to me at that moment I do not know, but I put my arms around his large head and kissed his muzzle while he rested his front paws on my shoulders and licked my face. "Here's a friend," I said to myself. Every night, in those hard days, I would go behind the barracks as soon as we returned from work with the wildly leaping and whining Sharik by my side. I would embrace his head, then, and kiss him, and a delightful, yet agonizing feeling swept over me. I remember thinking—and taking morbid pleasure in the thought—that this dog was the only being in the world that cared for me now, my friend, my only devoted friend. . . .

## VII

### NEW ACQUAINTANCES. PETROV

But time went on and I grew used to the new life little by little. With every day, the scenes about me became less and less disturbing. The events, the surround-

ings and the people grew somehow familiar. It was impossible to reconcile oneself to this life, but it was time to accept it as an accomplished fact. I had stifled within me all the anxieties I had had at first. I no longer wandered about like a lost soul with my anguish written on my face, and the convicts' eyes did not follow me with such burning curiosity or affected insolence as before. I had become a familiar figure and was glad of it. I knew the barracks as well as I had known my own home and grew accustomed to things to which I have never dreamed I could. I went to have half of my head shaved every week. After work every Saturday we were called in turn to the guardhouse where the army barbers lathered our heads with cold water and scraped them with saw-like razors. I shudder even now when I think of that torture. But I soon found a remedy. Akim Akimovich recommended a convict of the military section who was willing to shave anyone's head with his own razor for one kopek. Many of the convicts employed him to avoid the army barbers, though they were not at all thin-skinned men. Our convict barber was generally called the major, though why I cannot say, since he did not resemble the major in the least. As I write these lines, I can see this barber major in my mind's eye. He was a tall, lean fellow, silent and rather stupid, always absorbed by his profession, always strap in hand, sharpening his worn razor day and night and apparently convinced that this was his mission in life. He was truly happy when the razor was very sharp and he could try it on a client. His soap and water was warm, his hand light and his work as smooth as velvet. He was proud of his skill and obviously enjoyed it, accepting his kopek fee with a nonchalance that plainly showed that he worked for art and not for gain. Our prison major descended with fury one day on A-v who had inadvertently referred to the barber as major. This was an insult which had touched him to

the quick. "Do you know what a major is, you black-guard!" he roared, giving A-v his deserts. "Do you understand what a major is? Don't you dare call some convict scum a major in my presence!" Only A-v could have got on with such a man.

I began to dream of freedom from the first day of my imprisonment. My favourite occupation was counting the days that were left a thousand different times in a thousand different ways. This was, indeed, blended with all my thoughts and I am sure that everybody deprived of liberty for a fixed length of time must do the same. I cannot say that all the convicts counted the days in the same manner, but their astonishing hopefulness struck me at the outset. The dreams of a prisoner differ greatly from those of a free man. The latter also hopes to improve his position or fulfil a wish, but apart from that he lives and acts; real life with all its chances and changes wholly engrosses him. It is quite different with the convict. He, too, leads a life of a kind, but no matter who he is or how long his term, the convict instinctively never accepts his present existence as something positive and final, as a part of his real life. Every convict feels that he is not at home, but merely a transient visitor. Twenty years in his eyes are no more than two and he is convinced that at the age of fifty-five he will be the same lively young fellow that he is at thirty-five. "Won't we live then!" he thinks and banishes all doubts and other tiresome thoughts. Even the man of the special section who has been sentenced for life thinks that St. Petersburg might some day send an order to the effect that the convicts should be transported to Nerchinsk and that fixed prison terms should be given to them. Wouldn't that be glorious! First of all, it would take six months to get to Nerchinsk and the life on the road was much better than in prison. He would finish his time in Ner-

chinsk and then— The astonishing thing was that even grey-haired men reasoned that way.

At Tobolsk I saw men fastened to the wall beside their bunks by chains two yards long for some monstrous crime committed after they had been sent to Siberia. They were there for five or even ten years. Most of them were bandits. I only saw one among them who had once been a nobleman and had served as an official somewhere. He spoke in soft lisps with a sickly smile. He exhibited his chain to us and the most convenient way of lying down on his cot. He must have been an atrocious character in his time. As a rule, these wretches were tame and even seemed content, and yet, they were terribly anxious to finish their chain terms and why? Because they would then leave their low, damp and stifling barracks, walk about the yard and—nothing more. They knew very well that a man released from the chain was kept in prison ever after, until he died in his fetters. They knew and yet were painfully eager to finish their chain term. Could they have stayed fastened to a wall for five or six years without hope and not died or went mad? Could some of them, indeed, have tolerated life at all?

I soon realized that work alone could save me by fortifying my health which otherwise would be undermined by constant worry, nervous irritation and the foul air of the barrack. I could preserve myself by keeping in the open air as much as possible, and working until exhaustion, I thought. This would enable me to leave the prison still vigorous, fit, not old. I was not mistaken: work and movement were very good for me. I was horrified to see how one of the convicts,\* a nobleman too, was wasting away like a candle. He had entered the prison with me, young, handsome, and vigorous, but left as a grey-haired

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\* Reference is to writer S. Durov, sentenced together with Dostoyevsky as a member of the revolutionary group headed by Petrashevsky.—*Ed.*

wreck who could hardly move his legs. "Anything but that!" I thought watching him. "I want to live and live I shall!"

My eagerness for work exposed me to contempt and ridicule. But I paid no attention to this and went wherever I was sent with a light heart—to burn and pound gypsum, for instance, one of the first jobs I learned. This was regarded as light work. Our engineers tried to make things easier if they could for the former gentlemen. This was not an indulgence, but mere justice. Would it have been right to expect the same heavy work from a man who was half as strong and who had never done manual labour? But even this indulgence was not always adhered to and more often than not was given on the stealth as the authorities outside the prison watched very closely. Not infrequently, we were sent to do hard work and the nobleman under such circumstances suffered twice as much as his comrades.

The three or four men sent to burn and pound gypsum were chosen from the older and weaker prisoners, including us. A man skilled in this work was sent along with us, too. The specialist to go with us for several years was one Almazov, a dark, thin elderly man, querulous and unsociable. He held us in profound contempt, but was too taciturn even to grumble at us much. The shed in which we calcined gypsum also stood on the steep lonely bank of the river. On a misty winter day there was something hopeless and heart-breaking about that wild, bleak view of the river and the opposite bank receding far away. But perhaps it was sadder still when the sun was shining over the boundless snow. How one would have liked to take flight over the steppes which spread unbrokenly southward for fifteen hundred versts.

Almazov generally set about the work grimly and silently. We were ashamed not to be able to help him properly and he indeed would not ask for our help, as if try-

ing to make us feel even more guilty and useless. All his work consisted of was heating the kiln to calcine the gypsum which we had brought for him. The material had to be extracted on the next day. Each of us then filled a box with gypsum and crushed it with a heavy mallet. This was pleasant work. The gypsum crumbled so nicely, so easily. We hammered at it with our mallets and the clatter was so nice and gay that it really cheered us. We were both tired and light-hearted, our cheeks flushing and our blood running more rapidly. Even Almazov looked at us with condescension, the way one looks at little children. He would light his pipe with an indulgent air, though still grumbling whenever he opened his mouth. He treated everyone like that, but I believe was a kind man at heart.

Another sort of work that I was put to was turning the wheel of the carpenter's lathe. It was a big, heavy wheel and not easy to handle, especially when a turner from the army was making a balustrade or the leg of a large table for some official, a job which required nearly a solid log. It was impossible to work alone in such cases and B.,\* another former nobleman, was sent to turn the wheel with me. The work was ours for several years. B. was a small, fragile man, still young, but suffering from a weak chest. He had come to the prison a year before me with two of his friends. One of them had been an old man who later died in prison. He had prayed day and night and had been greatly respected. The other was quite a young man, ruddy, strong, and courageous. He had in fact carried his friend B. when he became exhausted after a half-day's tramp, and in this way they covered several hundred versts of their march to Siberia. Their friendship was very moving. B. was a culti-

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\* Reference is to J. Bogusławski, a Polish revolutionary, sentenced to hard labour in 1849.—*Ed.*



vated man with a generous nature spoiled somewhat by his illness. We would tackle the wheel together and even took some interest in our work. I found it splendid exercise.

I was also very fond of shovelling away the snow after the frequent blizzards lasting all day and all night. The drifts at times covered the windows half-way and at others completely buried the houses. When a blizzard was over and the sun reappeared we were sent out in groups and sometimes in a body to clear the grounds about the public buildings. Each of us was given a shovel and a general task was assigned, a task which often seemed impossible to cope with. But we set to, and the fluffy, ice-crusts snow was sliced away in enormous lumps and scattered into brilliant dust. The shovel sank easily into the white, glittering mass. The prisoners were nearly always merry when doing this work. The fresh winter air and movement excited them. Everyone was in good spirits and there was no end of laughter, shouting, and joking. We even played snowballs until the more serious-minded grew indignant and our gaiety usually ended in oaths and curses.

The circle of my acquaintances gradually broadened, though I had never gone out of my way to make friends as I was still restless, gloomy, and distrustful. Friendships were struck up spontaneously. To begin with, I began to receive a visitor, the convict Petrov. He was *a visitor* in the real sense of the word, as he lived in the barracks of the special division at the farthest end of the prison. It seemed obvious that there could be no ground for friendship: there was nothing in common between us, nor could there be. Yet Petrov thought it his duty to call upon me regularly in the first months or to accost me when I was taking my solitary evening stroll behind the barracks after work. His persistence was disagreeable at first, but his innate tact eventually

made his visits pleasantly diverting, though he was not at all talkative or sociable. He was not tall, but strongly built, very agile and restless. He had a rather pleasant, pale face with high cheek-bones, a bold glance, white and regular teeth and a lower lip eternally packed with tobacco. Many of the convicts had the habit of chewing tobacco. He seemed younger than he really was. I thought he was thirty whereas he was actually forty. He talked to me without constraint as with an equal, yet attentively and politely. When he noticed that I wished to be alone, he would stay for about two or three minutes and then go away, thanking me for my attention, something that he never did when talking to others. Strangely enough, these relations lasted not for a few days, but for several years during which we never grew more intimate, though he was sincerely devoted to me. Just what he wanted from me, I could never quite tell. He never tried to borrow money and if he did steal something from me, he seemed to do it somehow inadvertently *through sheer habit*. So there was no interested motive as far as I could see.

Somehow I always had the feeling that he did not live in the same prison as I, but somewhere else, perhaps in another town, and that he had only dropped in when passing to hear the news and see how we were all getting on. He was always in a hurry to go as though he had left someone waiting for him, or had interrupted some important work. Yet, he was not a bustling sort of a man. There was also something strange in the way he peered about him, his eyes seeming to reach for remoter objects than those they fell upon, and there was a shade of levity and boldness in them. The habit gave him an absent air. I often looked to see where he was going when he left my barrack. Where could he have been so anxiously expected? But he simply went to one of the other barracks or to the mess room and sat down

to listen to a conversation. He would sometimes join the talk with animation only to break off suddenly. But whether he talked or not, one had the impression that he was very busy and urgently expected elsewhere. Strangest of all, he was completely idle except for the compulsory work. He knew no trade and never had any money, which seemed to trouble him not at all. And what did he talk about when we met? The talk was as strange as himself. When he noticed me walking alone behind the barracks, he would make straight for me no matter where he happened to be going. He always turned from his path sharply and walked so quickly that he seemed to be running.

"Good evening!"

"Good evening!"

"Am I disturbing you?"

"Not at all."

"I wanted to ask you something about Napoleon. He is a relation of the one who came to us in 1812, isn't he?"

Petrov once attended a school for soldiers' sons and knew how to read and write.

"That's right. He is."

"They say he's a president. What sort of a president?"

His questions were always so abrupt and pressing as though he were inquiring about some urgent matter which would not brook the least delay.

I told him what sort of a president he was and added that Napoleon would perhaps become an emperor soon.

"How's that?"

I explained it to him as well as I could. He stood listening, seeming to grasp my words very well and bending an ear to hear better.

"Hm. . . . I also wanted to ask you, Alexander Petrovich, if there really are monkeys with hands that

reach down to their feet, monkeys as big as the tallest man?"

"Yes, there are such monkeys."

"What sort are they?"

I explained this too as well as I could.

"Where do they live?"

"In warm lands. On the Island of Sumatra, for instance."

"In America, is it? I have heard that the people there walk with their heads downwards."

"No, of course not! You must have heard something about the antipodes."

I told him where America lay and explained what the antipodes were. He listened so attentively one might have thought that it was the antipodes that had brought him to me in the first place.

"I see," he said finally. "And last year I read the story about the Countess de la Vallière. Arefyev brought the book from the adjutant. Is it true or has it all been made up by Dumas?"

"It was made up, no doubt."

"I'm much obliged to you, good-bye."

And Petrov would disappear. Our conversations were always in the same vein.

I made inquiries about him. M. warned me against the man. He told me that many convicts had filled him with terror especially in his first days, but none of them, not even Gazin, had produced a more dire impression than Petrov.

"He is the most resolute and fearless of all convicts," said M. "He's capable of anything if the fancy strikes him. He may take it into his head to kill you and do it in cold blood without a shred of remorse. I even think the man is not quite sane."

This opinion only heightened my interest. But M. did not seem able to account for his feelings. Though I knew

Petrov for several years, talked to him almost every day, and he was sincerely devoted to me all this time—why I don't know—and lived prudently and did nothing at all terrible, yet, strange as it may seem, I grew more and more convinced that M. was right and that Petrov was indeed the most resolute and fearless man, one who would not stop at anything. I could not say exactly why I thought so.

Petrov, by the way, was the man who would have killed the major but for a sheer chance which saved him, as the prisoners said—only because the major had happened to leave before the flogging. When still a free man, he had once been struck by a colonel during drill. I suppose he had been beaten before, but he was not in a humour to be insulted on that particular day and killed the colonel right then and there in full view of the battalion. I do not know, however, the details of the story as he never talked about it. These incidents were mere outbursts in which his whole nature revealed itself in a flash. They were very rare and as a rule he was very prudent and quiet. His passions were smouldering deep within him under a layer of ashes. I never noticed a shade of the vanity or pretence in him which were so typical of the others. He hardly ever quarrelled, neither was he friendly with anyone except, perhaps, Sirotkin and then only when he had need of him. I did see him very angry one day, however. Something had been kept from him, which he thought to be unjust. The offender, Vasily Antonov, was a tall athletic man, spiteful, bellicose and not at all a coward. The two had been shouting at each other for a long time and I thought that their altercation would end in blows, since Petrov sometimes, though very rarely, would brawl and scuffle like the lowest convict. But this time, it happened differently: breathing heavily Petrov grew pale, his lips livid and trembling. He got up and slowly, very slowly

and almost soundlessly—he liked to walk barefoot in the summer—approached Antonov. The customary raucous cries and laughter of the barrack were suddenly broken by a hush in which the buzzing of a fly would have been loud. All stood looking and waiting. Antonov leapt to his feet, his face queerly unhuman. I could not bear to see more and left the barrack, sure that the scream of a dying man would overtake me on the steps. But nothing of the kind happened. Antonov had quickly thrown him the contended object—a wretched pair of foot rags. Some moments later, Antonov of course muttered a few curses, but merely to show that he had not been cowed. Petrov seemed not to hear and did not answer. He was content with the outcome and the rags. In a quarter of an hour he was loafing about the barracks again, looking for a group whose conversation he might pause to hear. Everything seemed to interest him and yet he cared for nothing at all, drifting hither and thither. He reminded me of a vigorous workman with nothing to do and ready to play with the children in the meantime.

Another thing I could not understand was why he stayed in prison; why didn't he try to escape? He would not have shrunk from the risk if he had really wanted to. Such men as he are governed by reason only until desire intervenes. But when at last they do desire something, there is no obstacle that can stand in their way. I am quite certain that he could have deceived everyone and survived in the forest or the bulrushes of the river without food for days on end. It was clear that he had not yet desired such a thing *with all his being*. On the whole, I never noticed much sound judgement or common sense in him. Such as he are born with a single idea which, unawares to themselves, goads them on all their lives. They are blindly urged on until they find their mission and then care nought for the consequences.

I often wondered how a man who had killed his colonel for a slap over the face could submit to a whipping in prison. This happened to him from time to time because, like others who had no definite occupation, he too smuggled spirits. He would suffer himself to be whipped like a man who knew he was wrong and consented to be punished. He would rather have died than obey if it had not been for this. I was also astonished more than once to find that he was stealing from me in spite of his friendliness. It would happen when the mood was on him. He stole my bible which I had asked him to take to another barrack. He had managed to find a customer on his way and promptly sold the book, spending the money on vodka. He had probably wanted a drink very badly and so he had had to do it. A man of his sort could kill someone for twenty-five kopeks simply to get himself a glass of vodka, though on some other occasion he might disdain a hundred thousand. He confessed to the theft on the same evening without a trace of remorse or embarrassment as though it were a little thing, not worth talking about. I tried to reproach him as he deserved. I was very sorry to have lost my bible. He listened meekly, agreed that the bible was a necessary book and regretted its loss, but still did not seem at all sorry that he had stolen it. He looked at me with such equanimity that I gave up scolding. He accepted my reproaches as a matter of course, knowing that he deserved them and admitting my right to rebuke him for my own satisfaction and consolation, but that come to think of it, it was only a bit of nonsense not worth a sensible man's attention. I had a feeling he regarded me as an infant who did not understand the simplest things. Whenever I tried to speak to him of things other than books or knowledge, he would answer politely, but in few words. I often wondered what made him ask so many questions about books. I observed him carefully to assure myself

that he was not ridiculing me, but no: he would listen gravely and attentively, though only fairly so, which was rather annoying. The questions that he put were clear and precise, but he seemed to take my answers for granted, listening only with half an ear. He must have decided once and for all that there was no use in talking to me about anything but books, that I was incapable of understanding anything else, so why bother me.

I was sure that he was fond of me and I found this very strange. Perhaps he regarded me as not entirely grown up and felt the compassion of the strong for the weak. Still, this did not prevent him from stealing from me, though I am sure that he pitied me even as he did it. "The poor chap," he must have exclaimed while laying his hands on my things, "he doesn't even know how to take care of his things." And that must have been just why he liked me. He told me himself one day that I was too trusting.

"You're so trusting, so trusting! How can I help feeling sorry for you!" he sighed and then added, "No offence meant, Alexander Petrovich! It's just straight from the heart!"

Men like Petrov stand out in full stature in moments of spontaneous upheavals when they attain their natural element at one bound. They are no orators and cannot incite or direct others or lead them in any enterprise, but they carry the enterprise through and are the first to begin. Without superfluous words or gestures, they are the first to hurl themselves upon the main obstacle with bare fists unfeeling and unthinking, and everyone is sure to follow blindly to the final wall where they usually leave their lives. I felt, somehow, that Petrov would come to an ugly end. The moment had to come when he would go to his doom. If he had not done so yet, it could be only because that moment had not yet come. On the other hand, he might die at a ripe old age after



a life of aimless roaming. Be it as it may, M. was perfectly right when he said that Petrov was one of the most desperate men in the prison.

## VIII

### RESOLUTE MEN. LUCHKA

It is hard to say anything definite about men who are resolute. They are as rare in prison as elsewhere. A man may look dangerous, especially when one remembers what is said of him. Some instinct prompted me to give them a wide berth at first, but then my attitude changed even towards the most desperate murderers among them. There were men who had never killed anyone, but were more terrible than those who had killed six. There were cases so strange that one could scarcely form an opinion of them. Some killings among the common people were prompted by the most extraordinary causes. The following kind is frequent. A man lived calmly and peacefully, resigned to his hard lot. He might have been a peasant, a household serf, a townsman or a soldier. But suddenly something went wrong within him and he plunged his knife into his enemy or oppressor; and that is where the strange part began: the man suddenly ran amuck. His first victim was his enemy or oppressor, and the crime was understandable because it had a motive. But afterwards, he killed indiscriminately, for the joy of it, to repay an abusive word or an unpleasant look, to make the number of his victims equal, or merely because: "Give way! Can't you see who's coming?" This was delirium, intoxication. It was as though he had crossed some fatal line and was elated to find that nothing was sacred any more. Some inner urge made him break all law and flaunt all authority to capture boundless and unbridled freedom and that thrill of horror and

loathing for himself which he certainly must have felt. Besides, he was constantly aware that dreadful retribution lay in store. He was like a man on a high tower staring at the depths yawning below, looking until he would gladly hurl himself headlong if only to hasten the end. And such things happened to the most quiet and inconspicuous people. Some of them indeed play-acted in their delirium; and the more downtrodden they had previously been, the greater their swagger and blustering became. They gloried in the revulsion and fear that they inspired. They affected *desperation* to the point where *punishment* was a relief to the strain of keeping up the game. The curious thing about them was that their excitement would only last to the moment of punishment as though this were the limit defined by an unknown law. Here, the man would suddenly be drained of courage and grow limp, whimpering and imploring, and be such a snivelling, white-livered wretch by the time he got to prison that one could scarcely believe he was that very same man who had slaughtered six.

There were some, of course, who were slow to submit even in prison and still preserved a shade of the old swagger. "I'm not what you think I am!" their bearing seems to say. "It's for six souls that I am here!" but sooner or later, they too would succumb. Only rarely would they recall their bravery of old, the only fling that they had known in their lives. They liked nothing better than to find some simple-hearted fellow before whom they could brag and strike attitudes, though trying their hardest to conceal their own eagerness to do so. And how artful they were in their vain caution, in the indolent casualness of their narratives! What studied snobbery there was in their every word! Where could they have picked it all up?

I heard such a story as I lay lonely and idle, one dreary evening early in my captivity. Through inexpe-

rience, I took the story-teller for a man of iron character, a colossus of crime, while at the same time Petrov seemed to me almost a comic figure. The point of the story was that he, Luchka, had killed a major in cold blood for the sheer joy of it. This Luchka was the little sharp-nosed young convict whom I have already mentioned. He was born in the south, though not a Ukrainian, and had been a household serf, I believe. There was something pointedly cocky about him. "Though I'm a little bird," his air seemed to say, "my beak and talons are sharp!" But the convicts were quick to sum up a man and he was not held in much esteem. He was very vain. Sitting on his bunk that evening, he was stitching a shirt, his usual trade. Next to him sat his neighbour on the plank shelf, a stupid, but good-natured and obliging giant whose name was Kobylin. Luchka often quarrelled with him in a neighbourly way, treating him with a high hand, to which Kobylin was mostly insensible. Knitting a stocking, he now sat listening indifferently to Luchka who spoke loudly and very distinctly for the benefit of all, though he pretended to be speaking only to his neighbour.

"I was sent to Ch-v one day, my boy, for vagrancy," he said, jabbing at his shirt with the needle.

"Was it long ago?" Kobylin asked.

"When the peas ripen it will be just a year. Well, we got to K-v where I lay in prison for a while. There were twelve Ukrainians with me, twelve men as strong as oxen, but a dull lot. The food was bad and the major in charge of the prison did everything to suit His Excellency's *funvenience* (Luchka mangled the word on purpose). One day passed and then another, and I saw that those twelve cowards of mine would do nothing. 'Are we going to let him have his way all the time?' I put it to them finally but all they did was laugh and

say: 'Go tell him yourself if you're so brave.' I says no more after that.

"One of those Ukrainians was so funny, awfully funny," he suddenly added, turning from Kobylín to address all who were listening. "He kept telling us about his trial and kept weeping hot tears. 'I have left my wife and children!' he would say. And to think that he was a big, stout, grey-haired man! 'There was a devil of a clerk at the trial,' he would tell us. 'He did nothing but scribble away. I said, "No," but he just kept scribbling on. "May you croak on it," I thought to myself—and him still scribbling like anything. And that's how I was done for.' Have you any thread, Vasya? The prison thread is rotten!"

"Here is some I bought at the market," said Vasya.

"The thread we get from our tailor shop is much better. We sent our invalid to the market the other day, to get some. What old hag could have sold him such thread, I wonder?" Luchka went on threading his needle.

"Some old crony of his, no doubt."

"Yes, that must be it."

"But what happened to the major?" asked Kobylín at last.

Luchka had been waiting for this, but did not make to go on with his story at once, as though Kobylín was not worthy of such attention. He calmly finished threading his needle and shifted his legs under him.

"At last I managed to get those Ukrainians so worked up that they called for the major. That same morning, I borrowed a knife and hid it just in case. Then we heard the major was coming, mad with anger too. 'Well!' says I to the Ukrainians. 'Now's the time to show what you're worth.' But God! How they did shake in their boots! The major rushed in among us as drunk as a lord. 'What's that! Who's that! I'm your tsar and God!' he yelled at us.

"When he said this, I stepped nearer to him with the knife up my sleeve.

" 'But no, Your Excellency, it cannot be that you are our tsar and God,' I said as I came nearer and nearer. 'How can it possibly be, Your Excellency, that you are our tsar and God?'

" 'So it's you, is it?'

" 'No, Your Excellency,' I said coming still closer. 'Our God Almighty and Ever Present is one and alone in heaven, as you probably know. And our tsar too is one and alone and placed above us all by God himself. He is a monarch, Your Excellency, while you are only a major, our chief by the grace of the tsar and your merits.'

" 'What, what, what's that?' he stuttered back at me. He was that surprised!

" 'That's what!' I said and whacked my knife into his belly to the hilt. It was a clever job. He rolled all over the floor with his legs kicking. 'Now you fellows over there,' I told the Ukrainians as I tossed away my knife, 'it's up to you to pick him up.'"

Here, I shall have to digress again. Such expressions as "I am your tsar and God" were unfortunately employed too often by many officers in the old times. I must admit that there are fewer of them now, perhaps none at all. I should also add that those who used these expressions were mostly officers who had been promoted from the ranks. The rank of officer seemed to have turned everything topsyturvy in them including their brains. After having endured long years under the knapsack, they at last found themselves to be officers, commanders, nearly noblemen, and were inclined in their ecstasy to exaggerate their power and importance—with regard to their subordinates of course. They were still grovelling before their superiors, which was quite unnecessary and even revolting

to many of their betters. The most servile of them would even tell their superiors that having once been privates themselves, they would never forget their place. To make up for this, they ruled their underlings with an iron hand. It is unlikely that any such are left who shout: "I'm your tsar and God!" Still, it is noteworthy that there is nothing which can irritate a convict more than such expressions. This overweening manner of speech and exaggerated opinion of their immunity fills the hearts of the most submissive with hatred and drives the most patient convicts to excesses. Fortunately all this belongs to the past and was punishable even in the old days. I can cite more than one example.

All arrogance and squeamishness tend to infuriate the convict. There are some who think that it is sufficient to feed and clothe the prisoner and treat him according to regulations. This is a delusion. No matter how humbled he may be, he instinctively demands respect for human dignity. The convict very well knows that he is a convict and an outcast, but no brands or fetters can make him forget that he is a man and that he must be treated as a human being therefore. *Human* treatment may humanize even those who have long lost all resemblance to humans. And it is precisely these unfortunates who crave human treatment more than anybody else. It is their only salvation, their only joy. I have met chiefs with a kind and noble character and have seen what beneficial influence they have exercised over the humbled. A few kind words might be enough to resurrect a convict morally. Such words made them as happy and as devoted as children. Another remark too is in place: the convicts do not like their chiefs to be *over*-familiar and good-natured.

They want to respect their chiefs and undue familiarity puts an end to respect. The convicts like their

chiefs to wear many decorations, to have an impressive bearing, to enjoy the protection of some higher personage, to be strict, important, just, and dignified. The convicts respected and even liked such a man more than any others for he preserved his own dignity and did no injury to theirs and everything then went well and as it should be.

"They must have broiled you badly for that!" Kobylin observed indifferently.

"I should say so! Alei, give me the scissors, will you? Aren't they going to play cards tonight?"

"They've drunk up everything. They would be playing if they had any money."

"If! Ifs fetch a hundred rubles on the Moscow market."

"And what did they give you for the whole thing?" Kobylin asked again.

"One hundred and five, my dear fellow, and I can tell you that they nearly killed me," said Luchka addressing himself again to the others. "They treated me with great ceremony. I had never been knouted before. The whole town turned out to see it. 'The murderer is going to get his punishment!' How stupid they all were! 'Look out!' Timoshka\* shouted as I lay down. 'I'm going to begin!' and he gave me one straight-away. I tried to let out a yell and opened my mouth, but there wasn't a yell in me. When he hit me the second time, well, believe it or not, I did not even hear them count '*two*.' By the time I came to, I heard them counting seventeen. They took me off the board four times to let me breathe for a half-hour and souse me with cold water. I stared at them with my eyes popping from my head, thinking I would die then and there."

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\* The executioner.—*Author's note.*

"But you didn't, did you?" Kobylin asked innocently.

There was an outburst of laughter and Luchka looked at him with the utmost disdain.

"A blockhead, that's what he is! Bats in the belfry," he added as though disgusted with himself for having talked to such an idiot.

"It's true, he is a little mad," Vasya explained.

Though Luchka had killed six, no one was afraid of him in spite of all his efforts to be regarded as a terror.

## IX

### ISAIAH FOMICH. THE BATH. BAKLUSHIN

Christmas day was approaching. The convicts were looking forward to it with something of reverence and I too began to expect something out of the ordinary.

Four days before the holidays we were taken to the bath, a rare occasion, especially in my early years. Everyone rejoiced and began to make preparations. We were to set out after dinner when no work was to be done. But the man who seemed most pleased and bustled about the most was Isaiah Fomich Bumstein, the convict Jew I mentioned in my fourth chapter. He liked to steam himself into a stupor. And whenever I turn to my old memories and recall the bath—which is well worth remembering—the first thing that comes to my mind is the blissful face of Isaiah Fomich, my unforgettable prison companion and barrack mate. What a curious man he was! I have already mentioned his appearance: a wizened little man of fifty, his face disfigured by a terrible brand, his body white and frail, like a plucked chicken's. His expression showed constant and unwavering self-satisfaction and even blissful happiness as if he were not at all sorry to have been condemned to hard labour. Since there



was no jeweller in town, he was always kept busy by orders from the townsmen and the chiefs who paid him something, little though it might be. He lived well, even *sumptuously* by prison standards, but saved his money and lent it to the other convicts at interest. He was the owner of a samovar, a good mattress, cups, and even a dinner-set. The Jews of the town patronized him. He went to the synagogue under escort every Saturday as was his right by law and, in short, found life enjoyable. He was waiting impatiently, however, for the end of his twelve-year term in order to marry. He was the oddest combination of childishness, stupidity, cunning, arrogance, good nature, timidity, and bravado. I was surprised to notice that the convicts never ridiculed him, but only chaffed him gently. Isaiah Fomich must have been amusing to all. "We have only one Isaiah Fomich and so leave him alone!" the convicts would say. He was proud of his importance, which also amused the convicts. His manner of arrival in prison was also comical—it happened before my time, but I was told the details afterwards.

One evening after work, word came that a Jew had been brought to the prison and was being shaved in the guard-house. As there was not a single Jew in the prison, the convicts awaited his appearance with impatience and surrounded him immediately he entered the gate. The officer led him to the barrack of the civil section and showed him his place on the bunk shelf. Isaiah Fomich then put down his sack containing the new things issued to him and his personal belongings, took his place on the shelf, drawing up his legs and not daring to look up. The convicts stood about laughing, making the usual sallies aimed at his Jewish origin. Suddenly, a young convict made his way through the circle, carrying an old torn pair of trousers and foot rags. He took a seat next to Isaiah Fomich and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Well, my dear fellow," he said. "I've been waiting for

you for the past six years. Tell me what you can give me for these things." He held up the rags he had brought.

Isaiah Fomich who had been so crushed that he had not even dared to look up at this medley of mocking, mutilated, and frightful faces, suddenly came to himself and began to examine the things with a knowing eye. Everyone stood waiting for his first words.

"Won't you give me a ruble in silver for them," said the pawner winking. "They are certainly worth that!"

"I can't give you a ruble for them, but I can give you seven kopeks."

These were the first words pronounced by Isaiah Fomich and there was general laughter.

"Seven! Well, let's have them. It's your luck! See that you don't lose my pledge. You'll answer for it with your head."

"With three kopeks in interest you'll owe me ten kopeks," said the Jew in a trembling voice, slipping his hand into his pocket. He was afraid, yet wanted to go through with the transaction.

"Three kopeks a year?"

"No, not a year, but a month."

"You're a hard bargainer, aren't you? What's your name?"

"Isaiah Fomich."

"Well, Isaiah Fomich, you ought to get on here. Good-bye."

The Jew examined the rags again, folded them up, and put them carefully into his bag, ignoring the laughter of the company.

It really seemed that everyone was fond of the man and though nearly every prisoner owed him money no one ever did him any harm. He was a mild sort of a man and as he saw that everyone was well-disposed towards him, he even began to swagger, though so childishly that no one minded. Luchka who had once known many Jews

often teased him not out of malice, but for amusement, as one plays with a dog or a parrot. Isaiah Fomich knew this, did not resent it, and expertly parried his sallies.

"Be careful, Jew. You'll catch one from me yet!"

"I'll catch one and you'll catch ten," Isaiah Fomich retorted.

"Scurvy Jew!"

"As scurvy as you like!"

"Dirty Jew!"

"A dirty Jew, but richer than you!"

"You betrayed Christ!"

"Now, did I?"

"Good for you, Isaiah Fomich! Leave him alone, Luchka. We have only one like him here!" the convicts laughed on all sides.

"You'll get a taste of the knout and be sent to Siberia."

"But this is Siberia!"

"They'll send you still farther!"

"Is God there?"

"Of course! What of it?"

"Then it doesn't matter. With God's help and money life is good everywhere."

"Good for you, Isaiah Fomich. See what a fine fellow he is!" the convicts shouted on all sides, and though he saw that they were laughing at him, the compliment gave him pleasure and he began to sing in thin treble: "Tra-la-la, la-la. . . ." A ridiculous tune and the only one he was heard to sing throughout his term. When he made friends with me, he assured me and even swore that this was the song sung by six hundred thousand Jews, young and old, when they crossed the Red Sea and that every Jew is bound by tradition to sing the melody after victory over an enemy.

On the eve of every Sabbath, on Friday night, the convicts would come from the other barracks to watch Isaiah Fomich celebrate it. He was so innocently conceited that

this general curiosity was pleasing to him too. He set the tiny table in his corner with pedantic importance, opened a book, lighted two candles, and donned something like a chasuble while muttering mysterious words. The brightly-coloured woollen cloth was carefully kept in his coffer. He wrapped his wrists in straps and finally attached to his forehead a little box which made him look as if he had a horn. Then he began to pray. He read the book in a singsong voice, cried out from time to time, spat, and made the wildest gestures. There was really nothing funny or strange about it all since this was prescribed by the rites of his religion. What was funny, however, was the airs which Isaiah Fomich gave himself before us while performing the ceremony. He would suddenly clutch his temples with both hands and begin to read with many sobs until they ended in a wail and his head almost touched the book in his grief. But suddenly he would laugh wildly and chant in a moving and solemn voice weak with happiness. "It's got him all right," the convicts would say.

One day I asked Isaiah Fomich just what those sobs and the sudden change to joy signified. He was always pleased when I asked him about such things. He explained that the sobs bemoaned the loss of Jerusalem and that the Law prescribed the pious Jew to groan and strike his breast. But at the moment of his most acute grief, he was *suddenly* to remember—and it was stipulated that it should be *sudden* and spontaneous—that a prophet had foretold the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. He was then to display boundless joy, to sing, to laugh, to express happiness in his voice and festive solemnity in his face. This *sudden* transition very much appealed to Isaiah Fomich and he explained the ingenious prescription with the deepest satisfaction.

One evening, while he was in the midst of his prayers, the major entered the barrack with the officer on duty and

several soldiers. The convicts at once sprang up and stood at attention before their bunks, but Isaiah Fomich alone continued to shriek and gesticulate more and more vehemently. He knew that worship was allowed, that no one had the right to interrupt him and that he, therefore, could continue with impunity. He must have found it delightful to cut a few defiant capers before the major and to show off before us. When the major came up to him, Isaiah Fomich began to sing his hymn of triumph to his face, shouting and waving his arms. He also assumed an expression of extreme happiness as was prescribed, blinking his eyes, laughing and nodding his head at the major. The latter at first stood dumbfounded, then burst into laughter, called him a fool, and went away, while Isaiah Fomich continued his shouting.

At supper, an hour later, I asked him what he would have done if the stupid major had lost his temper.

"What major?"

"Didn't you see him?"

"No."

"Why, he stood only two steps away from you, looking at you."

But Isaiah Fomich assured me most earnestly that he had seen no major because he had been in a state of ecstasy while praying and could neither hear nor see anything that went on around him.

I can still see Isaiah Fomich wandering about the prison on Saturdays trying his best to do nothing as is prescribed by the Law. And what improbable stories he would tell me when he returned from the synagogue, what absurd rumours from St. Petersburg he brought with him assuring that he had heard them from his Jewish friends who in their turn had got the news first-hand in the capital.

But enough of Isaiah Fomich.

There were only two public baths in all the town. One

was kept by a Jew and was divided into compartments which were hired for fifty kopeks by the wealthier class. The other bath, old, dirty, and close, was intended for the common people and it was there that we were taken.

It was a crisp, sunny day. The prisoners were delighted with the prospect of getting away from the prison and walking through the town. The laughter and jokes continued all the way. We were escorted by a platoon of soldiers with loaded rifles—quite a sight for the townspeople. The bath-house was so small that we had to be divided into two shifts, one of which waited in the cold anteroom, while the other was bathing. Even so, it was difficult to imagine how half of our party could squeeze in there. Petrov remained at my side without my having asked him to do so and even offered to rub me down. Baklushin, a convict of the special section, offered to help me too. He was the convict known as the sapper and, as I remarked before, was the gayest and most agreeable of my companions. Petrov helped me to undress, because I generally took a long time getting my things off, and it was almost as cold in the anteroom as outside. It is no easy matter for a novice to undress, for he must know how to unfasten the leather straps under his chains. These straps about a handsbread in length are buckled over the underclothes, just beneath the ring which encloses the ankle. Though a pair of them cost sixty kopeks, each convict had to buy them for the simple reason that it was impossible to walk without them. The ring does not fit snugly over the ankle, one can even pass a finger between the iron and the flesh, so that the convict would find his ankles raw in a single day. But to remove the strap is not the main task. It is much more difficult to remove the underclothes. Getting the underclothes off is a prodigious operation. To get it off one's left leg, one had to pass it between the leg and the ring, then pass it back through the same ring. When it was completely off, one

had to pass it all through the ring on one's right ankle and to push it back through the same ring. The entire procedure had to be repeated when the fresh underwear was to be put on. A novice would never guess how it was all done, and the first man to teach me the trick was Korenev, a former brigand chieftain who had been chained to the wall in Tobolsk for five years. After some practice, the convict managed it without the slightest trouble. I gave Petrov a few kopeks to buy soap and a bunch of bast wisps. Each convict, true enough, was issued a bit of soap no bigger than a twenty-kopek piece and no thicker than a slice of cheese served in a middle-class home. The soap was sold in the anteroom as well as honeyed tea, rolls, and hot water. According to the agreement with the proprietor each convict received only one pailful of hot water, but those who wished to wash themselves more thoroughly could buy another pailful for half a kopek, receiving their water through a small window in the wall.

As soon as I was undressed Petrov took me by the arm as he noticed that I found it difficult to walk in my chains. "Pull them up higher," he advised, supporting me as he would a child. "Mind the step." I was ashamed to give him so much trouble and would have liked to assure him that I could walk very well unaided, but he would not have believed me anyway. He treated me as an awkward child whom any man must help. Still, he was anything but a servant. If I had offended him, he would have behaved quite differently. I had promised him nothing for his assistance, nor had he asked me for anything. What could have prompted him to take such care of me?

When we opened the bath-room door I felt as if we had come into a section of hell. The room was some twenty-five feet long and as many in width. There must have been a hundred or at least eighty men packed together here, for there were two hundred of us in all and we had

been divided into two parties. Blinded by the steam we slid over the slime hardly knowing where to set a foot. I was frightened and turned back, but Petrov reassured me and with great trouble we succeeded in reaching the benches by stepping over the heads of the convicts squatting on the floor so that we had to ask them to bend down. The benches were all occupied and Petrov explained that we would have to buy a place. He at once began to bargain with a convict near the window and gained the place for the price of a kopek. The man took the coin which Petrov had prudently brought along and crept under the bench where it was dark, dirty and the slime was at least an inch thick all around. The convicts swarmed even under the benches. There was not a space even as small as the palm of a hand that was not occupied by crouching figures splashing water over themselves from their pails. Others stood upright, pail in hand, the dirty water running down their bodies into the shaved heads of those who were seated. Still others sat crouching on the upper shelf and the steps leading to it. There was little washing being done, however. The common people do not care to wash with soap and water, but prefer to steam themselves hard and then douse themselves with cold water. That is what they call a bath. About fifty bundles of twigs were rising and falling on the steam shelf where the convicts were lashing themselves to insensibility. The steam grew ever denser until the room was scalding hot and all this was accompanied by an uproar of shouts, laughter, and the rattling of a hundred chains. Those who tried to move from their spots, got their chains entangled with those of their neighbours, swore, slipped, and fell on the heads below them, dragging others with them. The dirt flowed by in streams on all sides. All seemed to have gone wild, shrieking and shouting. There was much jostling and swearing at the window to the anteroom where the hot



water was delivered and much of it got spilt over the heads of those who were sitting on the floor. The moustached face of a soldier would peer in through the door from time to time to see if there was no serious disorder. The shaved crowns and the reddened bodies seemed more ugly than ever. The scars left by the whips and the rods stood out on their backs as though the stripes were about to bleed again. Terrible scars! A cold shiver ran over my back when I saw them.

Whenever steam was added, and thick, scalding clouds filled the room, there were fresh shouts and laughter. A slashed back, or a shaved crown or a fettered foot would flash in the mist here and there; and as the crowning touch there was Isaiah Fomich howling with joy on the highest of the shelves. He was steaming himself into insensibility, but apparently no degree of heat could satisfy him. For a kopek he had hired a helper to swish him with birch twigs, but unable to bear the heat, the man had tossed away his twigs and fled from the perch to douse himself with cold water. Isaiah Fomich then hired another and then a third. He grudged no money on such an occasion and changed his helper four or five times. "Good for him, Isaiah Fomich! He's doing a fine job of steaming!" the convicts yelled from below. He felt that he had indeed outdone all the others, and in his triumph sang out his "Tra-la, la-la!" in a wild falsetto which pierced the general hubbub. It occurred to me that if ever we should meet in hell, we should find the place exactly like this. I could not help telling this to Petrov, but he merely looked around and said nothing.

I wanted to buy a place for him on the bench at my side, but he sat down at my feet and declared that he was quite comfortable. Meanwhile, Baklushin bought us pails of hot water and brought them to us as we called for them. Petrov assured me that he would get me washed from head to foot so that "we would be nice and

clean." He strongly advised me to take a steaming, but I could not bring myself to risk this. He gave me a soaping all over and concluded by saying: "Now *we* will wash our legs." I was about to tell him that I could do it myself, but there was no use in contradicting. There was nothing servile about the "we." He merely meant that real men could wash their own legs, but not "we."

When he had washed me, he took me back to the ante-room as ceremoniously as we had come, treating me as if I were made of porcelain. He helped me into my clothes and only then rushed back to have a thorough steaming.

When we got back to the barrack, I offered him a glass of tea which he accepted readily. He drank it and thanked me. I decided to go to the expense of a dram of vodka in his honour and succeeded in getting it at once. He was very pleased, swallowed the vodka, grunted with satisfaction, declared that this had restored him to life and then hurried to the kitchen as if most urgently wanted there. His place as my companion at tea was taken by Baklushin, the sapper, whom I had invited at the bath.

I never knew a more agreeable man than Baklushin. Though he was quick-tempered and quarrelled often as he did not like to be meddled with and was well able to defend himself, his quarrels were short-lived and all the convicts liked him. He was welcome everywhere. He was known even in town as a gay and amusing man. Baklushin was a tall fellow of thirty with a frank and kindly expression on his handsome face none the worse for the wart on the cheek. He mimicked all and sundry in such a comical manner that everybody who watched him was in a roar. He also belonged to the jokesters, but never allowed himself to be abused by the fun-haters. No one would dare to say that he was an empty and useless man. He was all energy and good cheer. We got acquainted on one of my first days in prison and he told me that he had been brought up in

a soldiers' school and then served as a sapper. He had been in good favour with the officers and was obviously proud of this. He immediately began to ask me about St. Petersburg. He had evidently done some reading. As we were having tea, he amused the whole barrack by relating how Lieutenant S. put the major in his place that morning. He told me, too, that the show the convicts were planning to stage on the holiday would be likely to come off. The actors had been found and the scenery was being prepared bit by bit. Someone in town had promised to furnish the women's apparel and it was hoped that a real officer uniform with epaulettes could be obtained through an officer's servant. The only danger was that the major might take it into his head to forbid the performance as he had done the year before. On that occasion, he had been in ill humour. He had lost heavily at cards, and there had been some disorders in the prison as well; but this year, he would probably not object. In short, Baklushin was very excited. It was clear that he was one of the sponsors of the affair and I made up my mind to be present. His childlike joy appealed to me. We talked, and among other things he told me that he had served in the army in St. Petersburg, but for some fault or other had been sent to the garrison battalion at R., in the rank of sergeant, however.

"It was from there that they sent me here," he added.

"But what for?"

"What for? You would never guess, Alexander Petrovich. For love!"

"Come now, they don't exile anyone for that," I laughed.

"And yet that's how it was! True, I shot a German with a pistol, but was it worth sending me here only for killing a German?"

"But how did it all happen? It must be quite a story."

"A very funny story, Alexander Petrovich."

"So much the better! Tell me about it."

"Shall I? Well, then, listen!"

And he told me a story which was not at all amusing, but very strange indeed.

"This is how it all happened," he began. "I had been sent to R., a large, fine city if not for the lots of Germans in it. I was still young and my officers thought well of me so that I walked about with my cap tilted on one ear and generally had a good time. I also winked at the German girls, of course. Well then, I fancied a German girl by the name of Louisa. She and her aunt made their living by washing fine linen. The aunt was an old hag, but they were quite well off. At first I just hung about their windows, but then got really friendly. Louisa spoke Russian well enough except for the rolling of her r's. She did it so nicely and was sweet all round. I tried to make headway this way and that, but 'No,' she would say. 'I want to preserve my innocence, Sasha dear, so that I can make a worthy wife for you.' And she would nestle to me and laugh like a little bell. She was so neat and tidy too. I have never seen another like her. It was she who made me think of marrying her. Why shouldn't I? And so I was preparing to ask the colonel for permission when suddenly Louisa failed to turn up once, twice, and a third time. I sent her a letter, but there was no answer. What could have happened to her, I wondered. If she had been deceiving me, she could have answered my letter and come to meet me just the same. But she was incapable of falsehood and that was why she had simply broken off with me. Perhaps it was the aunt who was at the bottom of it, I thought. I had not dared to visit Louisa at home and though the aunt had known of our relations we had had to keep out of her sight. I ran about like a madman and wrote one last letter, saying that if she did not turn up I would go to her aunt to have it out with her. This must have frightened Louisa, be-

cause she turned up at last in tears, and told me that a German named Schultz, a distant relation, a rich and elderly watch-maker had proposed to her. He would make her happy, he said, and he would have a wife to comfort him in his old age. He had been thinking of this for years, but had kept it a secret. 'He is a rich man,' she said, and so it is a question of my happiness. You wouldn't want me to give up my happiness, would you?' She threw her arms around me, weeping. She seems to be talking sense, I thought to myself. What's the good of marrying a soldier, even if he is a sergeant. 'Well, Louisa,' I said to her then, 'good-bye and may God protect you. Is he good-looking at least?' 'No,' she said, 'he's old and has a long nose.' The thought of him made her laugh. And so I went away. 'It's just my luck,' I said to myself.

"On the next day I went to have a look at the German's shop. She had told me the address. He was sitting behind the glass, making a watch. He was a man of about forty-five with a crooked nose, goggle eyes, and a very high and stiff collar. He was very impressive and I was so angry that I spat. I thought of smashing his show-window, but changed my mind. What was over, was over. I got back to the barracks that night, lay down on my cot and, would you believe it, Alexander Petrovich, I wept. . . .

"A few days passed. I did not see Louisa. Then I heard from an old woman, who was a laundress too and saw Louisa sometimes, that the German had learnt of our relations and for that reason had decided to marry her as soon as possible. If not for this, he would have waited another year or two. He'd made Louisa promise never to see me again, she said, and refused to loosen his purse strings because he might yet change his mind. The old woman told me that he had invited Louisa and her aunt to take coffee with him the next Sunday together with another relative, a former shopkeeper who was now very

poor and served as an assistant in some basement shop. When I heard that they were to settle the affair on Sunday, I was so wrought up that I could not calm myself. I kept thinking about it all the next day and the day after. That pig of a German would not leave my mind.

"On Sunday morning, I was still wondering what to do, but after the early chapel service, I suddenly jumped up, got into my greatcoat and rushed to the German's house. Just why I went there and what I meant to say I did not know. For some reason or other, I slipped a pistol into my pocket. It was a little pistol with an antiquated hammer; I had played with it when I was a boy and it was really quite useless. I loaded it just the same, thinking that I would frighten them with it if they insulted me and tried to throw me out. When I came, they were all in the backroom; there was no one in the shop at all, not even a servant. He had only one servant, a girl who did the cooking. I went through the shop and found the door closed, an old backdoor, fastened from the inside. I stood still and listened: they were talking German. I dashed the door open with a kick and saw a table laid for dinner, a large coffee-pot boiling on a spirit-lamp, a plate of biscuits, a small decanter of vodka, herrings, sausage, a bottle of wine. Louisa and her aunt in their Sunday best were sitting on the sofa opposite the German who was well combed and well groomed, his collar stiffer than ever. There was also another German, an old man, grey and fat. He was just sitting there, saying nothing. Louisa turned very pale when she saw me. The aunt sprang up and sat down again, while the German frowned and got up. He was very angry.

" 'What can I do for you?'

"I was put out by the question, but was very angry too.

" 'What can you do for me? Is that the way to receive a guest? I'm your guest, don't you see?'

"The German reflected for a bit and said: 'Seat yourself.'

"I sat down.

" 'Now pour me some vodka,' says I.

" 'There is the vodka, please. . . .'

" 'No, you pour me some good vodka!' I was very angry, you see.

" 'This vodka is good.'

"The idea that he thought so little of me made me angrier still, especially with Louisa looking on.

" 'So you've decided to insult me, you German!' I said after swallowing my vodka. 'I've come as a friend and you don't want to be friendly!'

" 'Your friend I cannot be: you are a plain soldier.'

"That was the last straw.

" 'So that's how it is, you wurst-maker! Do you know that this very minute I can do anything I like to you? Do you want me to shoot you with this pistol?'

"I drew the pistol and put it to his head. The women sat staring more dead than alive, while the old man quivered like white jelly.

"The German seemed very surprised at first, but then pulled himself together.

" 'I have no fear of you,' he said. 'As a man of honour I ask you to stop this foolishness at once, but I have no fear of you.'

" 'Oh yes, you have.' He did not dare to move his head.

" 'No,' he said, 'you will never dare to do it.'

" 'And why not?'

" 'Because it is strictly forbidden and strictly punished!'

"May the devil take that fool of a German. If he had not egged me on, he would have been alive now.

" 'So you think I would not dare!'

" 'No.'

" 'I wouldn't?'

“ ‘You absolutely will not dare to do this!’

“ ‘Won’t I, you wurst-maker?’ I pressed the trigger and down he rolled from his chair.

“I put the pistol in my pocket and walked out, leaving the three of them stunned. As I entered the gate of the fortress, I tossed the pistol into the weeds near by.

“In the barrack, I lay back on my cot, sure that I would be arrested at any moment. But nobody came and towards evening I felt so sad that I went out: come what may I had to see Louisa. There was a crowd outside the watch-maker’s house and I could see the police too. I asked an old woman to call Louisa. She came out at once and threw herself on my neck in tears. ‘It’s all my fault,’ she said. ‘I should not have listened to my aunt.’ She also told me that her aunt had gone straight home after what had happened and was ill with fright. She had not told anything to anyone and had also forbidden her niece to say anything. ‘Let them do what they like,’ she said. Nobody saw it happen. The watch-maker had sent his servant away because she would scratch out his eyes if she knew that he intended to get married. And there were no apprentices. He had set the table and made the coffee himself. As for the relative, he had scarcely spoken a word in all his life and was not likely to begin now. He had taken his hat and was the first to leave. He was quite sure to say nothing.

“And so he was. For two weeks no one troubled or even suspected me. You needn’t believe it, Alexander Petrovich, but those two weeks were the happiest in my life. We saw each other every day and she was fond of me as never before. ‘I’ll go with you, wherever they send you. I’ll leave everything for your sake.’ She moved me so that I thought of killing myself. But they arrested me two weeks later. The old man and the aunt had agreed to denounce me.”



"But excuse me," I interrupted. "You should have got ten, at most twelve years in the civil section for that, but you were sent to the special section. Why?"

"That's a different story," said Baklushin. "When I was taken to court, the captain in charge called me the worst names he could think of. Finally, I could not endure it and shouted to him: 'Stop swearing, you rotter, don't you know you're in the presence of the court!' This brought a fresh charge against me and I was sentenced to four thousand strokes and to be sent to the special section. When I was taken out to run the gauntlet, the captain was punished too; he was demoted and sent to the Caucasus as a private. Good-bye, Alexander Petrovich. Don't forget to come to our performance!"

## X

### CHRISTMAS

At last the holiday came. On Christmas eve the prisoners did almost no work. Some went off to the tailor-shop or the workshops while the rest lined up for the roll-call and though assigned to work in various places, immediately returned to the prison, singly or in groups. And after dinner nobody left the prison at all. Even in the morning the greater part of them went about their own affairs, some to see to the smuggling or ordering of vodka, others to meet their cronies or to collect small sums owing to them for previous work against the holiday. Baklushin and the other performers made the rounds of their various acquaintances, mainly officers' servants, to obtain the costumes. Some ran about with a harassed and preoccupied air solely because others did. Although they had no source from which they could expect to get any money, they looked as if they were also getting money from somebody. In short, every-

one behaved as if the morrow would bring a wonderful change.

Towards evening the old invalids who had been to the bazaar on the prisoners' errands, returned with all kinds of food: meat, suckling-pigs, even geese. Many of the prisoners, even the most thrifty and cautious who had been saving their coppers all year, thought it their bounden duty to be free-handed on this occasion and celebrate it on a grand scale. The morrow was a real holiday solemnly recognized by the law. The prisoners could not be sent to work on that day and there were only three such days a year.

And then, what a host of memories must have been stirred in the hearts of these outcasts. The holy feasts are so vivid in the minds of the common people from early childhood. They are days of relief from heavy work, days of family reunions. They are remembered with pain and longing in prison. The observance of the holy feasts was almost ceremonial among the convicts; there was little drunkenness; everyone was very solemn and seemed to be busy with something, though many of them had almost nothing to do. Even the drunkards and idlers tried to preserve a certain dignity. It was as if someone had forbidden them to laugh. The general mood verged on pedantic and irritable intolerance, and whoever disturbed the tone even inadvertently was promptly put into his place with yells and oaths as though he were showing disrespect for the holiness of the day. It was remarkable, this mood of the prisoners, and even touching. Besides his inborn awe of the great day, the convict was instinctively aware that by observing the day, he brought himself into communion with the world at large, that he was not altogether an outcast, a lost soul, a piece of flotsam after all, that in prison, too, things were just the same as among decent people. They felt it and showed it, and it could not have been otherwise.

Akim Akimovich, too, was getting ready for the holiday in his own way. He had no family memories, having grown up an orphan in a stranger's house and begun his service almost from the age of fifteen. Nor had he known many joys, because he had always led a regular and monotonous life, afraid to depart by a hair's breadth from his duty. Nor was he particularly religious because seemly behaviour had consumed all his talents and peculiarities, all his passions and desires, both good and evil. As a result, he made ready for the holiday without flurry or agitation, untroubled by nostalgic and altogether useless memories, but with as much calm, methodical seemliness as was required to fulfil his obligations and the ceremonies laid down once and for all. And in general, he was not inclined to ponder overmuch. He never troubled to think about the meaning of any fact, though he observed the rules with religious accuracy once they had been shown to him. If he had been ordered to do the exact opposite on the next day, he would have done that too with the same obedience and precision as on the day before. Once, and only once, in his life had he tried to live by his own lights—and had landed in a convict prison. The lesson was not lost on him. And though he was never to grasp exactly what he was guilty of, yet he inferred one salutary rule: never in any circumstances should he try to reason since it was not for his mind to ask the whys and wherefores as the expression among the prisoners went. Blindly devoted to ritual, he regarded even his Christmas suckling-pig as a special Christmas one and not an ordinary piglet which was stuffed with *kasha* and roasted with his own hands (this was another thing he knew how to do), and which could be bought and roasted at any other time. Perhaps he had been used from his childhood to seeing a suckling-pig on the table on that day and had deduced that it was essential to this day, and I am sure that had he once failed to partake of it on

Christmas, he would have been troubled by a pang of conscience all his life. Until the holiday, he had gone about in an old jacket and trousers, which, though decently patched, were quite worn out. It turned out now that he had carefully kept the new clothes issued to him more than four months before in his box with the pleasant thought of putting them on brand-new on the holiday. And wear it he did. He got out his new clothes the evening before, unfolded them, inspected them, brushed them and, having set everything to rights, tried them on. They fitted perfectly; everything was as it should be, the jacket buttoned up closely to the top, the collar which seemed made of cardboard propped his chin high, the waist was tightened like in a uniform, and Akim Akimovich bared his teeth with pleasure and preened rather dashingly before his tiny mirror which he had rimmed with gilt paper in a free moment. There was only one hook on the jacket collar which seemed out of place somehow. Akim Akimovich at once decided to resew it. Having done so, he tried the jacket on again and found it altogether satisfactory this time. Then he folded the things neatly as before and, his mind at rest, put them away until the morrow. His head was already well shaved, but a close look in the mirror revealed that the crown was not quite smooth, that there was a barely perceptible roughness, and off he went at once to the "major" to have himself shaved properly and well. Though no one could possibly inspect Akim Akimovich, he had his crown shaved solely for his peace of mind so that no one should reproach him for anything on such a day. Reverence for a button, a shoulder-strap, a lapel had been stamped on his mind from childhood as an indisputable obligation and on his heart as the pinnacle of beauty that any honest man could hope to achieve. Having seen to everything, he, the barrack elder, ordered the hay to be brought in and carefully watched it being strewn on the

floor. This was done in the other barracks as well. Just why I do not know, but we always spread hay on the barrack floors at Christmas. His labours done, Akim Akimovich said his prayers, lay down and immediately fell into the serene sleep of a baby, determined to wake up as early as possible in the morning. But then, all the prisoners did the same. They went to bed earlier than usual in every barrack. The usual evening work was not taken up and the *maydans* were not even to be thought of. Everybody was waiting for morning.

At last, it came. When it was still dark and the drum was just sounded, the barracks were opened and the sergeant on duty who had come in to call the roll wished them all a merry Christmas. They returned his greetings respectfully and kindly. Having quickly said their prayers, Akim Akimovich and others with geese and suckling-pigs roasting in the kitchen, hurried to see what was being done with them, where they had been put, and so on. Through our small windows plastered with snow and ice we could see bright fires blazing across the yet dark yard in all six kitchen stoves kindled before dawn. The prisoners in their short sheepskin coats just slung over the shoulders were already moving about in the twilight, all making for the kitchen. There were some, though very few, who had already called upon the tapsters; these were most impatient. But on the whole, everybody behaved in a seemly and respectful fashion and with unusual decorum. There was no swearing or quarrelling. Everyone seemed to understand that this was a solemn occasion. There were some who paid visits to the other barracks to wish happiness to their friends. The spirit of friendship hovered in the air. I must remark in passing that friendship between convicts was almost unknown. I do not mean a general friendly atmosphere—which was altogether out of the question—but private friendship so to speak: one prisoner becoming the friend

of another. Such a thing hardly ever occurred, and this was highly characteristic; it is never so among the free. With very rare exceptions, the relations between the convicts were generally impersonal and dry and governed by a certain formality established long ago once and for all.

I also went into the open. The day was just breaking and the stars fading. A thin frosty vapour hung over the yard. Smoke welled from the kitchen chimneys. Several prisoners whom I passed readily wished me happiness in the friendliest way. I thanked them and returned their good wishes. There were some among them who had not exchanged a word with me throughout the month.

A prisoner from the military section, his sheepskin flung loosely over his shoulders, overtook me near the kitchen. He had caught sight of me from way off and kept calling: "Alexander Petrovich! Alexander Petrovich!" He must have been hurrying to the kitchen. I stopped to wait for him. He was a young fellow with a round face and a quiet gaze, one who had little to say to anybody and had not spoken to me or paid me the slightest heed from the day of my arrival: I did not even know his name. He ran up to me quite breathless and stopped in his tracks, staring at me with a stupid though blissful smile.

"What is it?" I asked wondering what he meant by standing there ogling me and smiling broadly without saying a word.

"Why, it's Christmas—" he murmured and realizing that there was really nothing to be said, hurried on to the kitchen.

Let me say in passing that we grew no friendlier even after that and hardly spoke a word to each other up to the day I left the prison.

There was a great bustle, a regular crush around the red-hot stoves in the kitchen. Every man was looking to his own property except for the kitchen-"maids" who

had begun to prepare the prison dinner which was fixed earlier that day. No one, however, had yet got down to eating, though some might have been hungry. All waited ceremoniously for the arrival of the priest. The fast was not supposed to be broken until he came. It was still daybreak when the corporal on duty shouted beyond the stockade: "Cook!" This cry was heard again and again for nearly two hours. The cooks were summoned to receive the gifts of charity brought from every quarter of the town. There was a great number of rolls, loaves, cheese-cakes, honeyed buns, sour-cream buns, pancakes, and pastry. I don't think there was a single housewife in the merchant and lower middle class homes who had not sent her baking as a Christmas gift to the unfortunates. Some of the gifts were rich indeed: many loaves made with the finest flour and butter and eggs. Other gifts were very modest: a little white loaf and two black buns thinly smeared with sour-cream, the gift to a poor man from a poor man. Everything, however, was received with equal gratitude without distinction of gift or givers. The prisoners who were summoned to receive the things bared their heads, bowed from the waist, chanted the giver a merry Christmas, and carried the gifts off to the kitchen. When great heaps of presents had been gathered, the barrack elders were summoned to divide everything equally between their barracks. There were no disputes or quarrels. Everything was done fairly and honestly. The portion allotted to our barrack was shared out evenly among us. This was done by Akim Akimovich and another prisoner. They divided the food and distributed it with their own hands. There was not a trace of displeasure or jealousy. Every man was content. There was not so much as a suspicion that something could have been held back or distributed unfairly.

Finished with his cooking, Akim Akimovich proceeded to dress with all ceremony, without leaving the smallest

hook unfastened. His toilet complete, he set about his prayers in real earnest. He prayed for a long time. Many other prisoners, for the most part elderly men, were doing the same. The younger men did not give much time to prayers. The most they would do was to cross themselves when getting up in the morning even on a holiday. Done with his prayers, Akim Akimovich approached me and offered me the compliments of the season. I invited him to tea and he, for his part, begged me to partake of his suckling-pig. A little later, Petrov, too, came hurrying to wish me a merry Christmas. He must have taken a drop or two already and though he had run so fast that he was out of breath, he did not say much, but only stood before me for a while with an expectant air. He soon hurried on to the kitchen. Meanwhile, preparations were under way in the military section barrack for the reception of the priest. This barrack was arranged differently from the others. The plank shelves extended along the walls and not through the centre of the room as in the other ones, so that it was the only room with a free space in the centre. It was probably intended to receive all the prisoners at once if need be. A little table covered with a clean towel was placed in the middle of the room. An icon was propped up on it and the icon-lamp lighted. The priest arrived at last with a cross and holy water. When he had prayed and chanted the service before the icon, the convicts came up one by one to kiss the cross with genuine reverence. The priest then made the rounds of the barracks sprinkling all of them with holy water. Reaching the kitchen, he praised our prison bread known all over town for its excellent flavour and the prisoners instantly decided that one of the invalids should immediately take two newly-baked loaves to his house. The cross was followed into the open with the same devotion with which it had been welcomed. The major and the commandant arrived almost immediately



after. The latter was liked and much respected. He made the rounds of the barracks accompanied by the major, wished everybody a merry Christmas and paused at the kitchen to taste the cabbage soup which was excellent on this day; nearly a pound of beef had been issued for every man. Butter too was generously portioned out for the millet porridge. The major gave the order to begin with the dinner as soon as the commandant had left. The prisoners did their best to avoid catching his eye. They did not like the malicious stare of his spectacles darting hither and thither to spot some disorder or someone guilty of something or other.

The dinner began and I found that Akim Akimovich's suckling-pig was done to a turn. I cannot explain how it happened, but some five minutes after the major had left, an unusual number of the convicts appeared to be drunk, though all had seemed almost completely sober before his departure. There were many flushed and beaming faces; balalaikas were suddenly brought out. The little Pole with his violin was already following a reveller who had hired him for the whole day and was incessantly scraping out his gayest tunes. The talk was growing louder and increasingly incoherent. The dinner, however, came to an end without grave disturbance. Everyone had eaten his fill. Many of the older and staid men went off to lie down as did Akim Akimovich evidently assuming that a nap was imperative after dinner on great holidays. The little Old Faith believer from Starodubye had a short sleep, then climbed on to the stove bunk, opened his book and read his prayers far into the night. He was pained to witness the "shame" as he called the general merry-making. The Circassians settled down on the barrack steps, watching the revellers with curiosity not unmingled with disgust. "*Yaman, yaman*," said Nurra to me when I met him, shaking his head with devout displeasure. "Oh how bad! Allah will be angry." Isaiah Fo-

mich lighted a candle in his corner with a stubborn air of challenge and began to work, evidently wishing to show that the holiday meant nothing to him. The *maydans* were already under way in the corners. Nobody was afraid of the invalids, and the sentries were posted only against the appearance of the sergeant who, more likely than not, would pretend to notice nothing. The officer of the watch had put in an appearance only three times that day. The drunkards and *maydans* had been hidden away when he came and, besides, he had apparently decided to ignore the minor breaches of discipline. Even drunkenness was regarded as a trifling misdemeanour. The celebrations grew steadily noisier and quarrels flared up too. The greater part of the prisoners, however, were still sober and well able to keep the revellers in check. The latter, for their part, drank on without restraint. Gazin was elated. He prowled about his bunk with a self-satisfied air. He had boldly brought his vodka from its hiding-place in the snow somewhere behind the barrack and put it under his bunk. He received his customers with a sly leer. As for himself, he had not touched a drop, intending to celebrate towards the end of the holiday after he had pumped all the money out of the others. The barracks rang with the singing, but the fires of the drunken revelry were already dying into maudlin fumes and the songs into tears. Their sheepskin coats over their shoulders, many convicts strolled unsteadily about strumming at their balalaikas. A chorus of eight had even been improvised in the special section and sang very well to the accompaniment of balalaikas and guitars. The real folk songs were few. I remember only one that was sung with great spirit.

*Last evening, my hearty,  
I went to a party.*

It was then that I heard a new version of the song; several verses had been added.

*I left things at home  
All tidy and trim:  
I scrubbed off the floors  
Some soup to make,  
I dusted the doors  
Some pies to bake.*

Most of the songs were special prison songs, all of them well known. One of them "Used to Be" was of the humorous kind and described how a man used to make merry and live like a lord in freedom until he got into prison. He used to enliven his "blancmange with champagne," but now:

*They give me cabbage leaves and water  
And you just watch me tuck it in.*

Another well-known song was also much in vogue:

*Oh, my life was once so jolly  
And I owned a pretty purse;  
Now it's lost and I'm in prison,  
Things have gone from bad to worse...*

and so on. There were sad songs too, one of them a typical prisoners' song also well known:

*Drummers call the jail to order  
Just when dawn begins to shine;  
Open doors let in the warder,  
As the convicts stand in line.  
No one, no one ever sees us  
And the life we live in jail,  
But we trust in our Lord Jesus,  
That he'll keep us live and hale.*

Another, even more plaintive song, had a pretty tune, but stodgy and common words, probably the composi-

tion of some exile. I can only remember a few lines of it:

*No more that country shall I see  
In which to birth I came,  
Condemned for all eternity  
To suffer without blame.  
Upon the roof the screech-owl cries,  
The woods repeat its groan,  
And my poor heart nigh bursts with sighs—  
Ne'er will I go back home.*

This song was sung often, not in chorus, but by single voices. Someone would come out on the steps of the barrack on a holiday, sit down, thinking his nostalgic thoughts, and begin to hum with his cheek propped on his hand. I would listen with an aching heart. We had some good voices among us.

Meanwhile, it was growing darker. The spectres of melancholy and dozed despair began to loom through the riotous celebrations. Someone who had been shouting with laughter only an hour before was now sobbing drunkenly in some quiet nook. Others had already come to blows again and again. Still others, pale and unsteady, were staggering about the barrack trying to pick as many quarrels as they could. Those who were not bellicose when in their cups searched in vain for friends to whom they could pour out their hearts and weep away their maudlin sadness. These poor fellows had meant to enjoy themselves and to spend the great day in rejoicing, but oh Lord, what a heavy and dreary day it had turned out for nearly every one of them. Each felt that hope had cheated him at the close. Petrov dropped in to see me several times during the day, he had drunk very little and was almost sober, but to the very last hour he was waiting for something to happen, something out of the ordi-

nary, something festive and madly jolly. He did not say so, but it shone in his eyes. He ran about tirelessly from barrack to barrack, but could find nothing extraordinary except drunkenness, senseless brawling and convicts completely befuddled. Sirotkin too was wandering about all the barracks, pretty and well washed in his new red shirt and looking at everything and everybody with quiet, childlike expectancy. The barracks gradually became disgusting and unbearable. There was much, of course, that might have seemed comical, but I was too full of sadness and pity for all of them and felt a stifling oppression. Two convicts stood arguing near by, which should stand the other a drink. They must have been reasoning with each other for a long time and even quarrelling. The one seemed to bear a long-standing grudge against the other. He was talking in a plaintive tone trying with a leaden tongue to prove that the other had treated him unfairly: a sheepskin had been sold at the last Shrovetide and the money withheld. There was some other grievance too. The accuser was a tall, muscular young fellow well-behaved and far from stupid when sober, but bent on making friends and pouring out his sorrows to them when drunk. The very tone in which he made his complaints seemed to imply that he was doing it only to make peace even more heartily afterwards with his enemy. The other was round-faced, short and stocky, a shrewd and tricky man. He had perhaps drunk more than his companion, but was affected only slightly. He was a strong-willed man, and known to be rather well off, but just now he for some reason tried to avoid annoying his expansive comrade and cut the altercation short by steering him towards the tapster; the other kept insisting that his companion was to stand him a drink "if there was any honour in him at all."

The tapster poured a glass of vodka with an air of

deference to his customer and a shade of scorn for his effusive companion who was not paying for his own drinks.

"No really, Styopka, you ought to do it," repeated the expansive friend feeling that he was now on safe ground. "Because it's your duty."

"Why waste my time talking to you!" Styopka answered.

"No really, Styopka, you're just lying," insisted the first taking the glass from the tapster. "Because you owe me the money. You've got no conscience. You must've borrowed a pair of eyes to be able to look at me. You're a bastard, Styopka, that's what you are. You're just a bastard, and that's all."

"Stop whining, you've splashed the vodka all over. If someone is good enough to treat you, then drink!" shouted the tapster. "I can't stand here waiting all day."

"I'll get it down. Stop yelling. What are you shouting about? A merry Christmas, Stepan Dorofeich," he added gently with a slight bow to Styopka whom he had called a bastard a second before. "May you thrive for a hundred years besides the years you have already lived." He gulped down the vodka, grunted and wiped his mouth. "I used to down a lot of vodka, friends," he solemnly remarked, addressing himself to the room at large. "But now my years are telling. I'm much obliged to you, Stepan Dorofeich."

"Don't mention it."

"So now, as I was saying, Styopka, apart from having treated me like a dirty bastard, you also—"

"Now look here, you ugly sot!" interrupted Styopka losing his patience at last. "Hear me and don't miss a word I say. The world's large enough: you go one way and I the other. Go on and don't let me lay eyes on you again. I'm sick of the sight of you."

"So you won't give me back the money."

"What money are you talking about, you sot?"

"Well, just wait; in the next world you'll be begging me to take the money and I won't. We earn our money by hard work, sweat, and blisters. They'll make it hot for you in the next world for my five kopeks!"

"Go on, go to the devil!"

"Where d'you get the go on stuff?"

"Get away I tell you!"

"Bastard!"

"Dirty gaol-bird!"

And the wrangling resumed worse than before.

In another place two others were sitting somewhat apart from one another on the planks, one of them, ponderous, fleshy, and flushed, a real butcher to look at, seemed deeply moved and on the verge of tears. The other was an undersized puny fellow with a long nose posing an eternal drop and little piggish eyes bent to the floor. He was a soft-spoken and cultivated creature who had once been a clerk and now treated his friend with a shade of condescension which the other secretly resented. They had been drinking together all day.

"He actually took a liberty!" cried the beefy friend rocking the little man's head which he was hugging in his left arm. By "took a liberty" he meant that he had been struck. The fleshy friend who had once been a sergeant was secretly jealous of his skinny companion and therefore vied with him in his choice of elegant words.

"And I reiterate that you are in the wrong," began the clerk dogmatically, his eyes still importantly on the floor.

"He actually took a liberty, d'you hear?" interrupted the other tousling his dear friend even more violently. "You're the only friend left to me now, d'you hear? That's why I'm telling you that he took a liberty with me!"

"And I reiterate that such a sour excuse constitutes an affront to your mind," replied the clerk in a polite

little voice. "You had better confess that all you think about is a drinking bout."

The beefy friend fell back a little, looked drunkenly at the priggish little figure and all of a sudden brought his hamlike fist down on the puny face. Thus ended their affection for the day, and the dear little friend rolled senseless under the planks.

And there, coming through the door was an acquaintance of mine, an infinitely good-natured and cheerful convict of the special section, rather intelligent, inoffensively amusing and with an unusually childlike expression. He was the man who, on the day of my arrival, wanted to know where a rich peasant was to be found and drank tea with me, though he had "respected himself too much for that." He was a man of about forty with an extremely thick underlip and a fleshy nose spotted with black-heads. He now approached leisurely strumming a balalaika, trailed by a very small yet big-headed prisoner whom I had known very slightly and to whom the other convicts paid no attention either. He was a queer little man, mistrustful, eternally silent and serious. He worked in the tailor-shop and was evidently trying to live by himself and keep aloof from all. But now that he was drunk, he attached himself to Varlamov and followed him about like a shadow. He seemed in a state of great agitation, waving his arms, battering the walls and planks with his fists and almost weeping. As for Varlamov, he did not seem to notice the man at all. It was remarkable that the two had never been friends before: they had nothing in common either in occupation or in character. They belonged to different sections and lived in different barracks. The little convict's name was Bulkin.

Varlamov grinned broadly when he saw me. I was sitting on the planks of my bunk near the stove. He paused at some distance from me, but then staggered



towards me suddenly inspired. Coming near, he struck a bold, jaunty attitude and, lightly brushing the strings and almost inaudibly tapping the floor, said rather than sang:

*Fair of face, full of grace,  
In her frock of silken lace,  
Comes my darling Mary.  
She looks so neat, she sings so sweet  
When she's walking down the street—  
Like a little fairy.*

The song seemed to overwhelm Bulkin.

"He's lying, brothers, every word of it," he shouted waving his arms. "There's not a word of truth in it. It's all a pack of lies."

"Greetings to old man Alexander Petrovich," said Varlamov looking me in the eye with a mischievous twinkle and all but throwing himself upon me to kiss and hug. He was quite tipsy. The expression "greetings to old man so and so" is used by the simple people all over Siberia even in reference to a man of twenty. The words "old man" have an honourable, respectful, and even flattering meaning.

"Well, Varlamov, how are you getting on?"

"I get on from one day to the next. But everyone rejoicing in this holy day usually gets drunk from the morning and so please forgive me," he said in a sing-song.

"He's lying again, he's lying, lying like a dog," screamed Bulkin banging the boards in a fit of despair. Varlamov, for his part, seemed to have taken an oath to pay not the slightest attention to his companion, which was rather humorous because Bulkin had attached himself to him since the very morning solely because he had somehow got it into his head that he, Varlamov, was "lying like a dog." He followed at his heels, taking exception

to his every word, wringing his hands, banging and bruising them, and apparently suffering sincerely out of conviction that Varlamov was truly "lying like a dog." If his crown had not been shaven he would undoubtedly have torn his hair in his frenzy. He seemed to have assumed responsibility for Varlamov's conduct and all of his companion's shortcomings, therefore, lay heavy on his conscience. The tragic side of it was that Varlamov did not so much as glance at him.

"He's lying, every word is a lie. Nothing that he says fits with anything."

"But what's that to you?" asked the prisoners laughing.

"I must tell you, Alexander Petrovich, that I used to be very handsome and that the girls took to me like bees to honey," said Varlamov quite irrelevantly.

"There he goes lying again!" interrupted Bulkin shrilly.

The convicts roared.

"And didn't I put on a show for them! I'd have a red shirt and velveteen trousers and I'd lie on the couch like some Lord Bottleneck, that is, drunk as a lord too, and in short—what would you?"

"It's all a lie," said Bulkin with conviction.

"In those days I had a two-storey stone house, inherited from my father. I squandered the two storeys in two years and finally had nothing left but the gates with nothing to hang them on. Well, what of it? Money is like a pigeon. It flies in and out."

"He's lying!" Bulkin declared with still more conviction.

"So when I came to my senses, I sent my family a tearful note. I thought they'd relent and send me a bit of money; as it happened I had gone against their will, didn't show proper respect. It's about six years since I sent it."

"You never got an answer?" I asked smiling.

"No never," he answered breaking into laughter too and bringing his face nearer to mine. "I'll tell you what, Alexander Petrovich, I've got a girl here."

"Have you?"

"Yes. Onufriyev just told me: 'Mine may be pock-marked, but she's got plenty of clothes and yours is pretty but a beggar.'"

"But it's not true, is it?"

"It is, she is a beggar," he answered and shook with noiseless laughter. The others laughed too. Everybody knew that he had really taken up with some beggar and had given her but ten kopeks in half a year.

"Well, what then?" I asked hoping to be rid of him.

He said nothing for a moment, regarding me tenderly.

"And so wouldn't you give me enough for a half dram, please, because of all that?" he said sweetly. "You know, Alexander Petrovich, I've been drinking nothing but tea all day," he added plaintively as he took the money. "I've swallowed so much of it that I can hardly breathe and it's swishing about in my belly as in a bottle."

Meanwhile, Bulkin's mental disturbance surpassed all bounds. He waved his arms madly and was almost weeping.

"Good people!" he cried in a frenzy. "Look at him. He is lying! Whatever he says is lies, lies, lies!"

"But what have you got to do with it?" the convicts asked again, somewhat taken aback by his vehemence. "You crazy little man!"

"I won't let him lie like that," shouted Bulkin his eyes flashing as he pounded his fists on the planks. "I can't bear him to go on lying like that!"

Everybody was laughing now. Varlamov took the money, bowed to me and hurried grimacing out of the bar-

rack, on his way to the tapster, needless to say. Before he went, however, he seemed to have noticed Bulkin for the first time.

"Well, come on," he said pausing in the doorway, as if he really needed him for something. "You umbrella handle!" he added scornfully letting the exasperated Bulkin go first and strumming his balalaika again.

But why describe this haze? The stifling day was over at last and the prisoners fell into heavy sleep on their plank bunks. They talked and wandered in their sleep even more than on other nights. A *maydan* was still in progress here and there. The long-awaited holiday was over. The morrow would bring back the old weekdays and the old work.

## XI

### THE PERFORMANCE

The first performance was held on the third evening of the holiday. There had probably been a good deal of bustle over it, but the actors had taken everything on themselves, so that the rest of us did not know how things were going and what had actually been done. We did not even know what was to be staged. For three days the actors had been trying to obtain costumes every time they were sent to work. Baklushin snapped his fingers with pleasure whenever we met. The major, apparently, also happened to be in a fairly good mood. Nobody could be certain, however, that he knew anything about the theatricals. And if he did—had he given formal permission or had he simply decided to say nothing and shrug his shoulders at this enterprise, while insisting, of course, that there should be order as far as possible? I think he knew about the performance; he could not help knowing, but did not wish to interfere, understanding that worse might happen if he did; the

prisoners would begin to drink and grow unruly so that it was better to have something to keep them occupied. I must say, however, that I only think he must have reasoned that way, because it was the most natural and sensible train of thought.

One might even say that if the prisoners had not had their performance or some other distraction during the holidays, the authorities themselves would have had to invent something of the kind. But since the major was distinguished by a way of thinking exactly opposite to that of the rest of mankind, it is very probable that I am grievously mistaken in assuming that he knew about the performance and just tolerated it. A man like the major must always have someone to oppress, someone whom he could deprive of his rights or property, in short, an opportunity to wreak order. He was well known throughout the town for this. What did he care if his measures caused mischief? There is a punishment for every mischief—people like the major argue. And all that these desperate ruffians require is severity and relentless application of the rules. These obtuse executives do not at all understand and in fact cannot understand that conformity to the letter of the law without comprehension of its spirit, leads directly to disorder and never to anything else. "That's the law," they say, "and what more do you want?" They are sincerely astonished if sound judgement and common sense is demanded from them in addition to the letter of the law. Common sense in particular seems a superfluous and shocking luxury to many of them—an intolerable restraint.

But, be it as it may, the senior sergeant did not interfere with the prisoners and that was all that they needed. I am confident that the theatricals and the gratitude felt for their permission were the reasons why there was not one serious disturbance, serious brawl or theft

during the holiday. I witnessed how the convicts themselves pacified some of the revellers and brawlers on the plea that the theatre might be forbidden. The prisoners gave the sergeant their word that everything would be peaceful and proper. They were glad to give this promise which was faithfully kept, and besides, they were flattered because their words were trusted. It should be added, however, that the permission cost the authorities nothing and involved no sacrifices on their part. No grounds were fenced off beforehand and the stage could be erected or dismantled in about a quarter of an hour. The performance was expected to last for an hour and a half and if an order had come from above to stop, the prisoners would have returned to their places in an instant. The costumes were hidden away in the convicts' boxes, but before describing these and the stage, I ought to say a few words about the programme, that is, about what the prisoners intended to perform.

No programme had been written out at first. Only one copy appeared for the second and third performances. It had been written by Baklushin and was intended for the officers and other gentlemen who had honoured our theatricals with their presence from the very first night. To be more exact, the gentlemen were represented by the officer on duty and the officer of the watch who looked in once. We also had one visit from the officer of the Engineers. The programme was in fact produced against such an emergency. The fame of our prison theatricals was expected to spread far and wide and even reach into the town itself, especially since it had no theatre. It was said that a group of the town's amateurs had once got up a single performance, but that had been all. The prisoners rejoiced like children in their smallest success and were very vain over it. "Who knows," they thought or said to one another.

"Perhaps the highest authorities may hear of it and come. They will see then what convicts can be like. This is no simple army show with dummies, boats on the waves and two-legged bears and goats. These are actors, real actors playing a comedy such as gentlemen go to see. There is no such theatre even in town. They say that there once was a performance at General Abrosimov's and that there will be another. As far as the costumes go, they will perhaps beat us, but when it comes to the *talk*—we'll yet see who is better. It may even reach the governor and you can never tell.... He may come to see for himself. There's no theatre in town, you know." The prisoners' imagination, in short, roamed far—especially after the success of the first night—even as far as the thought of rewards and shortened terms of imprisonment; though at the same time they almost immediately began to make fun of their own flights of fancy. In a word, they were children, nothing more than children even though some of these children were forty years old.

But though I had no programme, I had a rough idea of the coming performance. The first piece was called *Filatka and Miroshka, the Rivals*.<sup>\*</sup> A full week before, Baklushin had been boasting to me that the part of Filatka which he had undertaken would be played better than anything of the like ever seen in the theatres of St. Petersburg. He wandered about the barracks bragging shamelessly yet rather good-naturedly and sometimes letting fly with some play-acting—from his part. Everyone would guffaw then, no matter whether it was funny or not. I must, however, add that even here the convicts did not forget to stand on their dignity: Baklushin's antics and the stories about the theatricals were the

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<sup>\*</sup> A popular vaudeville by V. Grigoryev. First staged in St. Petersburg in 1831.—*Ed.*

delight either of the rawest new-comers or else of the most important convicts whose authority was unshakable, and who were not afraid, therefore, of giving frank expression to their feelings even if they were of the most spontaneous (that is, the most unseemly according to prison tone) character. The others heard the stories in silence. Though they did not condemn or contradict the tellers, they did their best to treat the matter with indifference and even with condescension. Only on the very eve of the performance, when only a day remained, there was general interest: what would it be like? How were the actors getting on? What about the major? Would it be as good as the year before last, and so on. Baklushin assured me that the actors were well chosen and that "each fitted his part." There would even be a curtain. The role of Filatka's bride was to be played by Sirotkin. "And you'll see for yourselves what he can look like in woman's clothes!" he said screwing up his eyes and clicking his tongue. The bountiful manor lady was to have a dress with flounces, a pelerine and even carry a parasol, while the benevolent landlord would appear in an officer's frock with epaulettes and would flourish a cane. The second piece was to be the drama, *Kedril the Glutton*. Though the title interested me, I could learn nothing about the play however much I tried. I learned only that it had not been taken from a book, but from some manuscript. They had got it from a sergeant in the suburbs, who had probably played a role in it in some soldiers' theatricals. There are such plays in our remote towns and provinces, unknown to anybody and perhaps never printed anywhere. They seem to have appeared of their own accord and are an inevitable feature of every folk theatre in certain parts of Russia. But speaking of the folk theatre, it would be useful indeed if some of our savants were to look into it more carefully than has been done. The folk theatre



exists and flourishes, and perhaps not without merit. I could not believe that all that I saw at our prison theatricals had been devised by the convicts alone. There must have been a tradition behind it, ideas and methods handed down from generation to generation. They must be sought among the soldiers, the factory workers, and even among the petty artisans and tradesmen in some of the obscure, poverty-stricken towns. They still linger in the countryside and among the servants of the large mansions in gubernia towns. I really believe that many of the old plays had spread in manuscript copies through the backstairs. The old landlords and Moscow nobles used to have their own private theatrical troupes recruited from among the serfs. It was in those theatres that folk dramatic art, which no doubt exists as such, had its beginning. As for *Kedril the Glutton*, I could learn nothing of it beforehand except that evil spirits were to appear on the stage and carry the hero off to hell. But why was he called Kedril and not Kiril? Was it a foreign name? No one could explain. It was announced that a "pantomime with music" was to come in conclusion. It was all very interesting. There were some fifteen actors, all of them bold and smart. They bustled about, held rehearsals, sometimes behind the barracks, but kept their own council and kept everything a secret. In short, they wanted to surprise us all with something quite unexpected and out of the ordinary.

The barracks were locked early on weekdays—as soon as it grew dark, but an exception was made during the Christmas holidays. The barracks were not locked on this day until the evening drum. This privilege was granted in honour of the theatricals. Every day throughout the holidays a messenger was sent with a humble request to the officer on duty "to allow the theatre and not to lock the barracks until late." He would add that there had been a performance the day before

and yet no disorder. The officer, for his part, reasoned to this effect: "It is true that there was no disorder yesterday, and since they give their word that there will be none today it means they will see to it themselves, which is the best guarantee. Besides, if the performance is forbidden—who knows, they are convicts after all! They may be deliberately troublesome and take it out on the sentries." There was another point too. Sentry duty was always very boring and here there was to be not a mere soldiers' show, but convict theatricals; and convicts are a curious lot; it might be interesting to watch, which the officer on duty had every right to do. If the senior officer should happen along and ask for the officer on duty, he would be told that he had gone into the barracks to count the convicts and lock them in—a plain answer which was also a satisfactory excuse. The theatricals were thus allowed every day throughout the holidays and the barracks were left open until the evening roll-call. The convicts had known beforehand that there would be no obstacles on the part of the guards and were reassured.

Soon after six o'clock, Petrov came to take me to the performance. Everybody went except the Old Faith believer from Chernigov and the Poles. The latter could not make up their minds to attend until the very last performance on January 4, and then only after they had been assured that it was very good and gay and quite safe. The squeamishness of the Poles, however, did not annoy the convicts who, on the contrary, received them very politely and indeed ushered them to the best seats. As for the Circassians and especially Isaiah Fomich, they were delighted with our theatricals. Isaiah Fomich donated three kopeks every time and put ten kopeks on the plate at the last performance, his face radiant with joy. The actors had decided to collect as much from each man as he could afford to give, for expenses and

the means with which to *fortify* themselves. Petrov had assured me that I would be given one of the best places no matter how crowded the "theatre" might be, since I was wealthier and might reasonably be expected to pay more than the others; besides, I was bound to know more about their art than even the actors. And so it turned out. But first let me describe the theatre hall and the arrangement of the stage.

The barrack of our military section in which the theatre was set up was about fifteen paces long and was accessible through the porch and a small passage. As I have mentioned before, this barrack was arranged somewhat differently from the others: the planks ran along the walls, leaving the centre free. The half nearer the porch entrance belonged to the audience, the other, which communicated with another barrack, to the stage. The first thing that struck me was the curtain which reached across the barrack ten paces wide. The luxury of it seemed fantastic. It was painted in oils all over, with pictures of trees, arbours, ponds, and stars. It had been pieced together of canvas patches, old and new, one man having given a piece here and another there. Old foot-rags and shirts had been sewn together and one stretch where the canvas had run short was eked out with paper which had also been begged scrap by scrap from various offices. Our painters, including the illustrious Bryullov, A-v, had undertaken to colour and finish the curtain. The effect was breath-taking and gladdened even the hearts of the most cantankerous who, when the show began, turned out to be as childlike as the most impulsive and impatient ones. Everyone was elated to the point of smugness. The lighting was provided by a few candle stubs. In front of the curtain there stood several chairs from the sergeants' room with two mess barrack benches behind them. The chairs had been intended for the highest ranking officers, the benches for

sergeants, the Engineer office clerks, guards, and others in authority but below officer's rank who might have looked in during the performance. And so indeed they did. Visitors kept coming throughout the holidays; on one evening there would be more, on another less and during the last performance not a single seat remained unoccupied. Behind the benches stood the convicts, bare-headed in deference to the visitors and wearing their padded jackets or sheepskins despite the steamy stuffiness. The prisoners, of course, were cramped. Some were literally sitting upon others, especially in the back rows. The plank shelves and the wings of the stage too were occupied and some of the devotees were even able to watch the performance through the backdoor from the adjoining barrack. In short, the crowding was perhaps comparable only to the crush I had seen in the bath. The door of the passage was opened and at the entrance too there was a cluster of spectators despite the twenty below zero weather. We, that is Petrov and I, were immediately let through the crowd to the benches where the view was far better than in the back rows. In their eyes I was the critic and connoisseur who had attended better performances in his time. They had seen Baklushin respectfully consulting me and so I had earned a place of honour. The prisoners, perhaps, were vain and light-minded, but only superficially so. They had ridiculed me when they first saw that I was a poor helpmate. Almazov, of course, had been able to fume over us, the aristocrats, and show off his skill at calcining gypsum. Their taunts, too, had been mingled with something else: we had been gentlemen once, people of the same estate as their former masters whom they could not be expected to remember very kindly. But now, in the theatre, they made room for me—a silent admission that here I was the better judge. Those who had been the most hostile (as I very well know) now

yearned for my approval and gave up their places to me without a trace of self-abasement. That is what I think now as I recall those old impressions. But even then, as I remember, I could sense nothing that was cringing in their attitude. Most characteristic of our common people is their sense of justice and their hunger for it. They have no inclination to thrust themselves forward *whatever the cost*, whether worthy of it or not. It is enough to remove the outer husk and look at the grain below closely and without prejudice to see things in them which one could never have suspected. Our sages cannot really teach the common people very much. On the contrary, they could learn a good deal from them.

When we were preparing for the theatre Petrov naïvely told me that another reason why I would be admitted to the front rows was because I was expected to contribute more money. There were no fixed prices: everybody gave what he could or wished. Nearly everyone contributed something, if only a half-kopek, when the plate went round. But even if it was partly the money that gained me the privilege, what a sense of dignity there was in it. "You're richer than we, so come to the front. Though we're all equal here, you will contribute more and are therefore a more welcome visitor to the actors. The best place must be yours, because all who are gathered here have been admitted out of respect alone and not for money; and so the least we can do is to sort ourselves out." What truly noble pride there lay in this! It was not a tribute to money but to self-respect. Generally speaking, there was no special respect for money as such, especially if the prisoners are regarded in a body. But even thinking of them singly, I cannot remember a man among them who debased himself for money. Scroungers there were and they wheedled money from me too, but there was more mis-

chief and play in it than real begging. It was rather simple-hearted and humorous. I wonder if I have put it clearly enough? But to return to the theatre.

The barrack interior presented a strange and lively scene before the curtain went up. To begin with, there was the crowded audience squeezed rib to rib, waiting blissfully and patiently for the performance to begin. The people in the back rows were climbing on to each other's backs. Many of them had leaned blocks of wood brought from the kitchen against the wall, and had clambered up on them supporting themselves with both hands on the shoulders of those below. They were to stand there for two hours, but were yet thoroughly pleased with their places and everything else. Others ensconced themselves on the lower step of the stove and also kept the same posture, leaning on those in front of them. So much for the back rows. The plank shelves along the sides were packed as well. Those were indeed very good places. Five or six men had climbed the stove and lay looking down from it. What a joy for them! The window-sills opposite were crowded with late-comers unable to find better places. All were on their best behaviour, wishing to make the best possible impression on the visitors. Every face shone with simple-hearted expectation, flushed and moist in the sultry air. What a strange gleam of childlike happiness, of pure innocent pleasure was reflected on those furrowed and branded foreheads and cheeks, in those eyes habitually extinguished or glaring madly. As everybody was bare-headed, all heads seemed cleanly shaven to me since I happened to be sitting on the right side.

At last, there was a great ado on the stage. The curtain was about to rise and the orchestra struck up. This orchestra, by the way, deserves special mention. Some eight musicians were perched on the side shelves: two fiddles (one had already been in the prison and the

other had been borrowed from the fortress, while the second player had been found among the convicts), three home-made balalaikas, two guitars, and a tambourine in place of a double-bass. The violins merely squeaked and shrilled, the guitars were atrocious, but the balalaikas were remarkably good. The nimbleness of the men's fingers was something like sleight-of-hand. All the tunes were dances. At the liveliest passages the players would suddenly rap the sounding-boards for emphasis. The tone, execution, manner of handling the instruments, and interpretation were highly original and peculiar to the convict prison. One of the guitarists was also a brilliant player. It was the very same former nobleman who had killed his father. As for the tambourine, he simply performed miracles: now he spun the instrument on his finger, now slashed it with his thumb; now came a loud throb, now the heavy staccato suddenly dissolved into innumerable tiny rustles. Finally, there were two primitive accordions. I had never suspected what could be done with these simple folk instruments. The blending of the tones, the intertwining of melody and most of all its spirit and interpretation were quite astounding. For the first time I understood completely the sweep of the reckless Russian dance song. The curtain rose at last. There was a general stir as everyone shifted his weight from one foot to the other and those at the back stood up on their toes; someone collapsed with his back against the wall; all mouths were open, all eyes fixed on the stage and all was still. The performance began.

Alei stood beside me with a group made up of his brothers and other Circassians. They had all grown passionately devoted to the theatre and went there every evening. Tatars and Moslems in general, as I have more than once observed, are very fond of shows of all kinds. Isaiah Fomich stood nestling against them and the mo-

ment the curtain arose became all eyes, ears and naïve and avid expectation of wonders and delights. I would have been really sorry if he were disappointed. Alei's sweet face shone with such beautiful childlike joy that the sight of him alone made me happy, and I remember, too, that whenever one of the actors made a particularly comical sally and the barrack rocked with laughter, I would turn to glance at him. He could not see me and was oblivious of me or anything but the stage at that moment. Not very far, on my left, stood another prisoner, an elderly man who always wore a frown, dissatisfied with everything. But he too noticed Alei and I saw him turn several times to look at him with a smile: it was so pleasant to look at the boy. He called him Alei Semyonich, I don't know why.

The performance began with *Filatka and Miroshka*. Filatka (Baklushin) was truly magnificent. He played his role with amazing precision. It was plain that he had thought out every word and gesture. He succeeded in lending meaning even to the emptiest phrases bending them to the character he portrayed. Add to these efforts his unquenchable high spirits, natural simplicity, and spontaneity and one could not help agreeing that he was a born actor, one of great talent too. I had seen Filatka on the stages of Moscow and St. Petersburg and I am positive that the actors there were inferior to Baklushin. In comparison with him, they were merely theatrical and not real peasants. They overacted in their zeal.

Baklushin had also been stimulated by rivalry: everybody knew that the role of Kedril in the second play had been taken by Potseikin, who for some reason was believed a better and more gifted actor than Baklushin; and the latter was hurt like a child. How many times had he come to me to pour out his feelings in the past few days! He shook with agitation as from a fever two



hours before the performance. When the audience laughed and shouted, "Baklushin! Good for him!" his face would grow radiant, his eyes shining with true inspiration. The kissing scene, when Filatka shouted to Miroshka, "Wipe your mouth!" and then wiped his own, made every convict rock with laughter. For my part, I was most interested in the audience. All characters lay bare before me now, surrendering to their enjoyment without reserve, shouting their approval with less and less restraint. Here one man nudged his neighbour, hurriedly whispering his impressions without caring or noticing whom it was that he spoke to. Another would turn at some particularly funny point as if inviting the audience to laugh with him, wave his arm and turn again eagerly to the stage. A third would simply click his tongue, snap his fingers and, as he found it impossible to stand still and there was no room to move, he would shift from one foot to the other. The gaiety had reached its highest point towards the end of the performance. I have exaggerated nothing. Imagine the prison, the fetters, captivity, long sad years to come and a life as monotonous as dripping rain on a dreary day in autumn—and then suddenly all these harried and depressed humans were allowed to enjoy themselves to their heart's content, to forget the heavy slumber of their lives and set up a theatre—and what a theatre! A theatre that aroused the jealousy and astonishment of the whole town: "That's what we're like!" They were curious about everything, the costumes for instance. It was such fun to see some Vanka Daredevil, or Netsvetayev or Baklushin in clothes so greatly different from those in which they had seen them daily for so many years. "He is the same convict and his fetters jingle the way they always do, but there he is now in a frock-coat, a round hat, and a cloak, just like a gentleman. He has also put a moustache on his face and hair on

his head. Look, he has taken a red handkerchief from his pocket and is fanning himself with it just to show he's a gentleman. Why, anybody would take him for a gentleman now!" Everybody was delighted. The benevolent landlord appeared in an adjutant's uniform—true a very old one—but with epaulettes and a cockaded hat—very impressive. There had been two claimants for this role and strangely enough they had quarrelled like little children over who should have it: both yearned to appear in an officer's uniform with epaulettes. The other actors indeed had had to interfere by voting the part to Netsvetayev, not because he was more dashing or handsome and, therefore, more suitable for the role of a gentleman, but because he had assured everybody that he would come on with a walking-cane and would flourish it and trace the ground with the end of it like the prince of dandies, which Vanka Daredevil could not even imagine because he had never seen a real gentleman. And sure enough, when Netsvetayev appeared on the stage with his lady, he did nothing but swiftly trace imaginary designs on the floor with a cane he had obtained somewhere, obviously regarding this as the acme of elegance and genteelness. At some time in his childhood he, a bare-footed little serf boy, must have chanced to see a handsomely dressed gentleman with a walking-stick and have been captivated by the skill with which he twirled it. The impression had never been effaced and now at the age of thirty, he remembered everything just as it had been for the delight and fascination of the entire prison. So absorbed was he that he did not look at anybody or anything even when he spoke, keeping his eyes only on the tip of his cane. The bountiful lady was remarkable in her own way: she appeared in a veritable rag of an old muslin dress with bare arms and neck horribly daubed with powder and rouge. She was wearing a calico nightcap tied under

her chin, she carried a parasol and a painted paper fan with which she fanned herself incessantly. A volley of laughter greeted the lady and she, for her part, could not contain herself either and burst into nervous giggles several times. The role was played by Ivanov. Sirotkin dressed as a girl was quite charming. The songs too went over well and, in a word, when the play ended the satisfaction was complete and general. There was no criticism and indeed could not be.

The overture *Ah, My Little Porch of Maple* was played as the curtain once more rose—this time on *Kedril*. The hero was something of a Don Juan. He and his servant were in the end carried off to hell by the devil. A whole act was performed, but it was evidently only a fragment, the beginning and the end of which had been lost. There was neither rhyme nor reason to it all. The scene was laid in an inn somewhere in Russia. The innkeeper ushered in a gentleman in a greatcoat and battered round hat. He was followed by his servant Kedril carrying a trunk and a chicken wrapped in blue paper. He wore a short sheepskin and a lackey's cap. It was he who was the glutton; the role was played by Potseikin, Baklushin's rival. The gentleman was enacted by the same Ivanov who had taken the part of the bountiful lady in the first piece. The innkeeper, Netsvetayev, warned them that the room was haunted by devils and went off. The gentleman, morose and worried, merely muttered that he had known it all along and ordered Kedril to unpack and prepare dinner. But besides being a glutton, Kedril was also a coward. As soon as he heard about the devils, he turned pale and trembled like a leaf. He would have run away if he were not afraid of his master. He was very hungry too. Lustful, stupid, cunning, and cowardly, he cheated his master at every step and yet was afraid of him. This remarkable study of a servant faintly resembled Leporello and was

actually well played. Potseikin had a decided talent and I really thought him an even better actor than Baklushin. I said nothing of this, of course, to Baklushin when I met him the next day as this would have distressed him. The convict who played the gentleman also did fairly well. He talked appalling nonsense, but the words were spoken correctly and briskly with suitable gestures. While Kedril was busy with the luggage, his master walked thoughtfully about the stage and declared for all to hear that his wanderings were to end that evening. Kedril listened, grimaced, said his asides, making the audience laugh with every word. He did not pity his master, but was very curious about the devils and tried to learn what he could about them. His master finally said that he had once appealed to the Evil One for help when in trouble and that the devils had promptly come to his rescue, but that today his time was up and they would perhaps come for his soul that very night, according to the bargain he had struck. Kedril was terrified. His master, however, did not lose heart and bade him to prepare the supper. Somewhat cheered by the prospect of food, Kedril brought out the chicken and the wine—stealthily snatching a morsel or two when he thought himself unobserved. This too made the audience laugh. Whenever the door creaked or the wind rattled the shutters Kedril shuddered and crammed more chicken than he could swallow into his mouth. There was another roar of laughter. "Isn't it ready yet?" called the gentleman as he paced the room. "In just a minute, sir. I'm getting it ready," answered Kedril as he sat down at the table and tackled the chicken in all earnest. The audience was delighted with the servant's precocity and the fact that he was duping the gentleman. Potseikin really deserved praise. The words, "In just a minute, sir. I'm getting it ready," were effectively spoken. Eating greedily, Kedril started at every

step of his master, afraid that he would notice what he was up to. Whenever his master turned round, he hid under the table, chicken and all. It was only when he had taken the edge off his hunger that he thought of his master. "Kedril! Are you going to be all night about it?" the gentleman shouted. "Ready, sir," Kedril announced briskly, suddenly realizing that almost nothing of the chicken was left. Only one leg of the fowl had remained on the dish. Gloomily preoccupied, the gentleman took his place at the table, while Kedril stationed himself behind his chair with a napkin. Every word, every gesture, every grimace of Kedril's when he made derisive signs behind his foolish master's back evoked irresistible laughter. No sooner had the gentleman begun to eat when the devils appeared. Here, everything grew incomprehensible: the devils popped up in the queerest manner. A door in the wings opened and a figure in white entered upon the stage. In place of its head it carried a lantern with a burning candle in it; another apparition, too, carried a lantern in place of a head and held a scythe in its hand. Nobody could explain the meaning of the lanterns, the scythe and the white attire; nor did anyone try. If they were there they must be there. The gentleman turned rather boldly towards the devils and said that he was ready; Kedril, on the other hand, was as frightened as a hare and crept under the table, not forgetting, however, to seize the bottle as he did so. The devils disappeared for a moment and Kedril came into the open. But no sooner had the gentleman returned to the chicken than the three devils burst once more into the room, seized him from behind and carried him off to the nether-world. "Kedril, help!" shouted the gentleman, but Kedril knew better than rescue his master. He had taken the bottle and the plate and even the bread under the table with him. He was undisturbed now, since the devils had whisked off his mas-

ter. He crept out into the open and looked around with a smile; he screwed up his eyes, took his master's seat and said to the audience in an undertone, "Well, now I am my own master." Everybody laughed with glee. In the same confiding tone Kedril then added, winking still more knavishly, "The devils have taken my master."

The delight of the audience knew no bounds. The devils had taken his master. It was said with such a comically triumphant grimace that it really deserved applause. But Kedril's luck was short-lived. He had just laid hands on the bottle, poured some wine into a glass and was on the point of drinking it when the devils stole up behind him on tiptoe and suddenly pounced upon him. Kedril yelled at the top of his voice. He was too faint-hearted to turn around; nor was he able to defend himself as his hands were occupied with the bottle and glass which he could not bring himself to put down. Gaping with fright, he sat very still for a moment, goggling at the audience, his face a study of comical terror. Finally, he, too, was lifted from his seat and carried away. Still clutching his bottle, he kept kicking and screaming. His yells could still be heard from behind the scenes. All were hilarious as the curtain fell and the band struck up a Kamarinskaya dance.

The dance was only barely audible when it began, but the tune swelled and the tempo quickened. The players' fingers rapped the sound-boards of the balalaikas. This was the Kamarinskaya at its full sweep and it would have been good for Glinka if he had chanced to hear it in our prison. The pantomime to music was about to begin. The Kamarinskaya continued throughout. The scene was laid in the interior of a miller's hut. The miller was mending his harness in one corner, while his wife was spinning flax in another. Sirotkin played the wife and Netsvetayev the husband.

Our scenery was poor in this piece as in the others, leaving more to the imagination than to the eye. A sort of rug or horse-cloth had been stretched across to represent the rear wall, while ragged screens had been set up on the right. The left was not screened at all so that the plank shelves were visible. The audience, however, was unspoiled and content to eke out the reality with their fancy, the convicts are especially rich in fancy: They call it a garden, so take it as a garden; if a room then a room; if a hut then a hut and why make a fuss about it? Sirotkin was very sweet dressed up as a young woman and complimentary remarks about him were whispered in the audience. The miller finished his work, took his hat and whip and signed to his wife that he had to go, but that if she received anyone in his absence-- and he pointed to his whip. His wife listened and nodded. The whip was probably familiar to her: the little woman was of the frivolous sort. As soon as her husband was outside she shook her fist after him. Then came a knock. The door opened and the neighbour appeared, another miller, a bearded peasant in a kaftan. He had brought a gift, a red kerchief. The wife giggled, but just as the neighbour was about to embrace her there was another knock on the door. What were they to do? She hastily hid him under the table and returned to her spindle. Another suitor came in, a military clerk. Up to this point the pantomime had been faultless and the miming irreproachable. It was astonishing to watch these untrained amateurs and one could not help thinking of the wealth of energy and talent that went to waste in misery and chains in our mother Russia. But the convict who took the part of the clerk had evidently played in some provincial theatre some time and was therefore confident that all our actors, without exception, were strangers to the art and could not even walk properly on the

stage. He strode about, for that reason, in the style of the old-fashioned classical heroes. He took a long stride and before moving the other leg up halted abruptly with his head thrown back, looking haughtily around, and only then took another step. If this gait was funny for a classical hero, it was still funnier for a military clerk. Still, our audience thought that this too was as it should be and took the lanky clerk's long strides for granted without a murmur of protest. Hardly had the clerk reached the middle of the stage, than another knock came. The hostess was in a panic. Where could she put the clerk? In the chest, which fortunately stood open. In he crept and the lid was lowered. This time it was a peculiar lover who entered. He was a Brahmin and even wore the correct dress which was greeted with laughter. This role was played by Koshkin and excellently done. Everything about him told of the Brahmin. He expressed his fervour by signs, raising his hands to heaven and then laying them to his breast. But he had not reached the tenderest part of his declaration when the door was struck a mighty blow. The very force of it showed that this was the master of the house. The wife was beside herself with fear, while the Brahmin rushed about like a scalded cat, begging her to hide him. Hastily, she pushed him behind the cupboard, seated herself at the spindle, forgetting to open the door, and began spinning away deaf to her husband's knocking. So nervous was she that she twisted at a thread which was not even in her hand and turned an imaginary spindle having forgotten to take the real one from the floor. Sirotkin's acting was superbly convincing. Finally, the master of the house kicked the door open and approached his wife whip in hand. He had been eavesdropping and seen everything. He made signs to her that he knew that three lovers were hidden here and he at once set about looking for them. The first whom he



found was the neighbour who was driven out of the room with blows. The faint-hearted clerk lifted the lid of the chest to run away and thus betrayed himself. The miller chased him towards the door with his whip and the lovelorn clerk had now forgotten all about his classical gait. Only the Brahmin now remained. The husband kept looking for him for a long time, found him behind the cupboard at last, bowed to him politely and then dragged him to the middle of the stage by the beard. The man tried to defend himself and cried out the word: "Accursed!" (the only word that was spoken). The host paid no attention to this and took his revenge in the previous fashion. Realizing that it would now be her turn, the wife dropped her spindle and fled from the room followed by the laughter of the audience. Without looking at me, Alei plucked me by the sleeve and cried: "Just look at the Brahmin!" and almost collapsed with laughter. The curtain fell and another scene began.

But I cannot describe all the scenes. There were two or three more, all of them funny and unaffectedly gay. If the convicts had not thought up these pieces by themselves, each of them had at least contributed something of his own. Almost every one of the actors improvised freely so that the same man played the same part differently every night. The last pantomime, a fantasy, ended with a ballet. It was the story of a funeral. The Brahmin and his numerous followers performed various conjurations over the coffin, but in vain. At last, the orchestra struck up "The Sunset," the corpse came alive and everyone danced with joy. The Brahmin danced with the corpse and did so in a most peculiar Brahmin manner. And that ended the performance until the following evening. Pleased and cheerful, the convicts dispersed praising the actors and thanking the sergeant. There were no quarrels. Everyone was unusually content, they actually seemed happy, and went to sleep

not in the usual frame of mind, but almost at peace. And all because of a performance! Incredible, as it seemed, it was no figment of my imagination, but quite true. These poor people had been allowed to live in their own way for a tiny space, to enjoy themselves as other people do, to pass one short hour free of the prison's routine—and their mentality was changed if only for a few minutes. I started from my sleep late at night: the old man was still praying on the stove bunk and would probably carry on until daybreak. My neighbour Alei was sleeping quietly next to me. I remembered that he had still been chattering and laughing about the theatre with his brothers before dozing off, and I watched his peaceful childish face with pleasure. Other memories arose: the day that had passed, the holidays and this, my first month in prison. I raised my head in terror, and saw my sleeping companions by the dim, wavering light of the prison candle. I looked at their pale faces, their wretched bedding, at all that hopeless misery and beggary. I peered at them as though trying to make certain that this was not an ugly dream but reality. But it *was* reality: someone groaned and another flung out an arm with a clash of fetters. Still another started in his sleep and began to talk, while the old man on the stove kept praying for all good Christians and I could hear his measured, quiet, long-drawn words: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us!"

"I'm not here for ever, but only for a few years," I thought and again laid my head on the pillow.

*End of Part I*

# PART TWO

## I

### THE HOSPITAL

I fell ill soon after the holidays and went to our military hospital. The building stood apart, half a verst from the prison. It was a long one-storey structure painted yellow. An extraordinary quantity of yellow ochre was used on it during the summer when it underwent repair. Its enormous courtyard held the offices, the doctors' cottages and other subsidiary buildings. The main building housed only the wards. There were many of these, but only two were allotted to the prisoners. They were always crowded, especially in the summer, and the beds had often to be moved closer together. Our patients were "unfortunates" of every kind. They were convicts from our prison, military prisoners gathered from all sorts of guardrooms, prisoners who had just received sentences or were as yet awaiting them; there were men from the penal battalion, a very strange institution where culprits or unreliable soldiers of the battalions were sent to be reformed, but from where after two years or more they emerged inveterate scoundrels of the rarest kind.

Those of our convicts who fell ill usually reported to the sergeant in the morning. They were listed in a book and sent with this book to the infirmary under escort. The doctors put all the convict patients through a pre-

liminary examination and those whom they found to be really ill they sent to the hospital. My name was entered into the book and soon after one o'clock, when everybody had left for the afternoon's work, I was taken to hospital. The patient took with him as much money as he could, some bread—since he could not expect to receive any rations in the hospital that day—a pipe, a tobacco pouch, a flint and steel. These last were carefully hidden in one's boots. I entered the hospital not without curiosity for this new side of prison life as yet unknown to me.

The day was warm, dull and sad, one of those days when places like hospitals seem to take on a particularly workaday dreary and sour air. The guard brought me into the reception-room where there were two copper tubs; two other sick convicts and their guards were waiting like myself. A medical orderly came in, looked us over in a leisurely authoritative manner and went off even more leisurely to report to the doctor on duty. The latter soon appeared, examined us, speaking to us kindly, and gave us sickness charts with our names. The details of our treatment, the medicines, diet and so on were the concern of the doctor in charge of the prison wards. I had heard prisoners praise the doctors highly. "They're better than fathers," they would say in answer to my questions when I was about to go to hospital. Our clothes were taken from us as we changed into hospital linen and we were also issued stockings, slippers, nightcaps, and thick brown dressing-gowns lined with rough canvas almost as unfriendly as sticking-plaster. To put it bluntly, the gown was very dirty, though just how dirty I did not realize until I found myself by my cot. We were then taken to the prison wards situated at the end of a long, high and very clean corridor. The outward cleanliness was gratifying; everything shone that met the eye. Still, it may only have

seemed so after the prison. The two convicts awaiting trial went to the ward on the left and I to the one on the right. An armed sentry and his helpmate stood before the door which was fastened with an iron bolt. A corporal of the hospital guard ordered them to admit me and I found myself in a long narrow room containing some twenty beds set along both walls. Three or four were still unoccupied. The beds were of wood painted green, of the kind that everyone in Russia knows only too well—as though ordained from above, they can never be without bugs. I was allotted a cot in a corner on the window side. As I have said, some of the patients were from our prison. A few of them knew me or had at least seen me before. But most of the inmates were awaiting trial or had come here from the penal battalion. There were not many so gravely ill as to be bed-ridden. The ones who were not seriously ill or convalescent were either sitting on their beds or pacing the room in the narrow passage between the cots. The ward was pervaded with the stifling hospital odour wafting all sorts of smells, medical and otherwise. The room was never aired though the stove was kept burning day and night. I folded back the striped cover of my bed and found a woollen blanket lined with coarse linen over a sheet of doubtful cleanness. A jug and a tin cup stood on the night-table covered with a napkin for decency's sake. There was a shelf underneath where teapots, pitchers, and other things were kept. There were few, however, who drank tea even among the sick. On the other hand, everybody including the consumptives, had pipes and pouches, but these were kept carefully out of sight under the bedding. The doctor and the other officials hardly ever inspected them and if they did happen upon someone with a pipe in his mouth pretended not to notice it. The sick, for their part, were very careful and always stood by the stove when they smoked. It was

only at night that someone might smoke in bed. No one ever made the rounds at night, except perhaps for the officer in charge of the hospital guard.

I had never been in hospital before and all this was very new to me. When I arrived I noticed that the patients were somewhat curious about me. They must have heard of me and now inspected me unceremoniously, even with a shade of condescension, as if I were a new boy in school or a petitioner in a public office. My neighbour on the right was a prisoner awaiting sentence, a former clerk and the natural son of a retired captain. He had been charged with counterfeiting and had already been lying in hospital for about a year. There was nothing apparently wrong with him but he assured the doctors that he was a victim of aneurism. His ruse was not without success. He had avoided corporal punishment and hard labour and a year later was sent to some hospital or other in T-k. He was a thickset man of about twenty-eight, a thorough rascal and a great adept in law; he was rather intelligent, loud-mouthed and over-confident and morbidly vain; he had convinced himself that he was the most honest and upright man in the world and completely innocent and was never shaken in this conviction. He was the first to address me, asked many questions and gave me some details about the hospital rules. It goes without saying that he told me at once that he was the son of a captain. He was anxious to pass for a nobleman, or at least as one well-born. Next, I was approached by a patient from the penal battalion who assured me that he had been personally acquainted with many exiled noblemen whom he mentioned by first names and patronymics. He was a grey-haired soldier. I could see that he was lying. His name was Chekunov and he was probably trying to curry favour with me because he thought I had some money. Noticing my little packet of sugar and tea, he

at once offered to procure a teapot and make tea for me. M-sky had promised to send me a teapot the next day by one of the convicts who would come to the hospital to work. But Chekunov helpfully intervened, procuring an iron pot and even a cup. He boiled the water and brewed the tea, in short, served me with such zeal that one of the patients made some caustic observations. This man, Ustyantsev by name, was a consumptive, and his bed stood opposite mine. He was the very same soldier under sentence who in terror of flogging had drunk a mug of vodka infused with tobacco and thus contracted consumption. Until now he had been lying silent, breathing with difficulty, watching me intently and seriously and following Chekunov's actions with indignation. His earnest venom made his anger somewhat comical. Finally, he could not restrain himself any longer.

"Just look at that serf. He's found a master at last," he said, gasping with weakness. The man was dying.

Chekunov turned round scornfully, "Whom are you calling a serf?"

"You!" answered the other in a tone so confident that one had the impression that he had every right to scold Chekunov and had been specially charged with this.

"So I'm a serf, am I?"

"Yes, that's what you are. He doesn't believe it, good people! He is surprised."

"But what has it to do with you? Don't you see that the gentleman cannot manage alone? He's not used to doing without servants. So why not help, you shaggy-faced lout?"

"Who is shaggy-faced?"

"You, of course."

"So I'm shaggy-faced, am I?"

"That's what I said."

"And I suppose you think you're a beauty yourself."

Your face is as handsome as the egg of a crow, if I'm shaggy-faced."

"Well, so you are! God has seen fit to strike you down, so why don't you lie still and die? But no, you've got to meddle in everything. Why, I would like to know?"

"Why? I'd rather bow to a boot than to a clog. My father never humbled himself and told me not to either. I—"

He would have gone on if not seized by a terrible fit of coughing that made him spit blood until the sweat of exhaustion beaded his narrow forehead. His eyes told how much he would have liked to keep up the wrangle; but in his weakness he could only wave his hand, so that Chekunov soon forgot him.

I felt that the consumptive's anger was directed against me rather than Chekunov. No one would have been annoyed with Chekunov or held him in contempt for doing me a service to earn a kopek or two. Everyone knew that he was doing it simply for the money. In this respect the common people are not so very scrupulous and can quickly discern the motive. What Ustyantsev really resented was myself, my tea-drinking and the fact that even in fetters I was still a gentleman unable to do without servants, though I actually did not wish or ask for any. Indeed, I had always wanted to do everything with my own hands and was particularly anxious to avoid making the impression that I was a soft-handed creature. To be honest about it, some part of my self-esteem depended on this. But it always happened, and I have no idea why, that I could never shake off my servitors and hangers-on who were sure finally to get me completely in their power in the end so that they really became my masters and I their servant. Somehow, it always seemed to turn out that I was too much the gentleman to do without servants and aristocratic ways. I found it very annoying, of course.



Ustyantsev, however, was an irritable, dying consumptive. The other patients preserved an air of indifference tinged with haughtiness. I remember, too, that they were all absorbed with one special matter. From their gossip I had learned that a man who was now running the gauntlet would be brought to us that very evening. Everyone awaited the new-comer with curiosity. They told me that the punishment would be light—only 500 strokes were to be dealt in all.

I took stock of my surroundings. As far as I could see, the genuinely ill suffered mostly from scurvy and eye diseases, the local scourges. There were several such patients in the ward. The others genuinely ill were cases of fever, various sores, and lung diseases. Unlike the other sections of the hospital, our two wards held all sorts of cases, including the venereal—all lumped together. I used the words *genuinely ill* because some of the patients had come merely for "a rest." The doctors admitted them willingly out of compassion, especially when they had vacant beds. Conditions in the guardrooms and prisons were so bad comparatively that many convicts were glad to be here in spite of the stifling air and the locked door. There were even lovers of bed-lying and hospital life in general. Most of these, however, were from the penal battalion. I scanned all my companions with curiosity, and I remember that one of them aroused my particular interest—another dying consumptive who lay in the next bed but one to Ustyantsev and almost opposite me. His name was Mikhailov. Only two weeks before I had seen him in the prison. He had been ailing for a long time and should have gone to hospital long before. But with obstinate and unnecessary patience he had suffered in silence and came to the hospital only during the holiday to die in three weeks of galloping consumption. The disease devoured him like a flame. I was struck by the terrible change of his features

—I had noticed his face when I entered the prison: for some reason it had caught my eye. His neighbour was a soldier of the penal battalion, an old man slovenly to the point of revulsion. But I am not going to enumerate all the patients. I only mention the horrible old man because he too had made an impression on me and in a few moments gave a fair understanding of some peculiarities of the prison wards. He had a most violent head cold at that time. He was sneezing for an entire week even in his sleep, sneezing in volleys of five or six and never forgetting to say each time: "Lord, what have I done to deserve this!" He was sitting on his bed, stuffing his nose with tobacco to clear his head. He sneezed into a checkered handkerchief, his own property which had been washed no less than a hundred times and was completely faded. His little nose was wrinkled in an odd fashion as he did this, revealing the blackened stumps of his teeth and red dripping gums. Finished with sneezing, he inspected his handkerchief and smeared all it held on to his gown. He did this for a whole week. This meticulous conservation of his private property to the detriment of the prison gown evoked no protests, though the others might some day find themselves wearing the very same gown. But our common people are careless and unsqueamish to an extraordinary degree. As for myself, I was so shocked that I at once set to examining the dressing-gown I was wearing with loathing and curiosity. I now realized that I had been disturbed by a strong odour for some time. It had grown warmer on my body and smelled more insistently of medicines, plasters, and, as I thought, even of pus. This was not to be wondered at since it had not left the shoulders of sick men for countless years. The coarse lining of the gown, perhaps, had been washed occasionally, but mine, at any rate, was impregnated with every conceivable fluid, water from the poultices and

so on. Besides, the prison ward often received men who had just run the gauntlet, their backs a mass of wounds. They were treated with wet poultices and the dressing-gown thrown over the wet shirt could not but suffer. Since then, whenever I happened to be in hospital, which was fairly often, I always donned my dressing-gown with creeping flesh. A special nuisance were the lice of an especially large variety with which the gowns were infested. The convicts took pleasure in killing them and when they cracked under their thick clumsy thumb-nails the hunters' faces expressed deep satisfaction. Bugs too were a scourge and the entire ward would often rise to combat them. And though everything seemed clean on the surface, apart from the depressing smells, the ward could not boast of more than skin-deep cleanliness. The patients were used to this state of affairs and considered it inevitable. The hospital rules, too, did not call for particular cleanliness, but of this later.

As soon as Chekunov had prepared my tea (made with the drinking water that was brought in once a day and quickly grew tainted in our atmosphere), the door opened rather noisily and the soldier who had just run the gauntlet was brought in under a reinforced guard. This was the first time I had seen a man in this condition. Later I was to see many more led, or, if their punishment had been exceptionally severe, carried in. And every time, the incident offered great distraction to the entire ward. The men were usually received with tense gravity and even sombre solemnity. The reception, to some extent, depended on the seriousness of the crime and consequently the punishment. A very badly beaten man who was reputedly a desperate criminal enjoyed more respect and attention than some poor little deserter like the one they brought in now. No particular sympathy was expressed or tactless remarks made in either case. The sufferer was helped and cared for in silence,

especially if he was helpless. The orderlies knew that they were placing him in skilful and experienced hands. The help usually consisted in frequent changing of sheets or shirts soaked in cold water and applied to the lacerated back, which was especially necessary if the victim could not look after himself, and in extracting the splinters of the broken rods, which frequently lodged in the back. This last operation was usually very painful, and I was always surprised at the fortitude with which the victims endured everything. I saw many of them, sometimes cruelly beaten, but hardly any ever so much as groaned. Only the face would change. It would turn pale, the eyes flaming, the look uneasy and wandering and the lips quivering so that the poor wretch would bite them until the blood came.

The soldier who had come in was a young fellow of twenty-three or so; he was tall, muscular, swarthy, and his face was handsome. His back had been hurt rather badly. He was naked to the waist and a wet sheet had been thrown over his shoulders making him shudder all over. He paced the ward for about an hour and a half and I studied his face: his features were blank, but his eyes had a strange wild shifting look as though they were unable to rest long on any object. It seemed to me that he had looked intently at my tea. It was still hot and the cup steaming, and he was chilled to the bone; his teeth were chattering. I offered him the cup. He turned abruptly, took the tea and gulped it down without sugar as he stood. He did it hastily and avoiding my eyes. He then put down the cup without so much as a nod and resumed his pacing. Words and nods he could not bother with. As for the other convicts, they at first avoided all conversation with the man. After they had done all they could to help him, they ceased to mind him for a time, probably wanting to leave him in peace

and not annoy him with questions or "sympathy." He seemed to be content with this as far as I could see.

Meanwhile, it had grown dark and the night-lamp was lit. Some of the prisoners—though very few—produced their own candles. Finally, after the doctor's evening visit, the sergeant of the guard came in to count the patients. The ward was locked, though not before the night bucket had been carried in. I was astonished to learn that it would remain in the ward all night, though there were proper latrines along the corridor only a few paces from the door. But such was the rule. In the day-time a prisoner might be let out, though for not more than a minute, but never at night. The prison wards had to be treated differently from the others so that prisoner patients would be undergoing punishment even while they were ill. I do not know who first established this order, but I do know that it had nothing to do with order at all and that barren pedantry had never expressed itself better than in this. The rule, of course, had not come from the doctors. I repeat that the convicts could not praise them enough and respected the doctor as they would their own father. The doctors were always kindly and friendly and this was particularly moving to the convict, scorned by all men, because he felt that their kindness was unfeigned. It could have been otherwise: no one would have called the doctors to account if they had behaved differently, that is, more roughly and cruelly, and therefore it showed that their kindness was genuine. Naturally, they knew that every patient, convict or not, needed fresh air, needed it as much as any other patient, even of the highest rank. The convalescent patients of the other wards were free to walk up and down the corridors and breathe air less polluted than that of the prison wards unavoidably filled with suffocating odours. It is both dreadful and revolting to picture to what extent the already poisonous at-

mosphere must have been further tainted at night when that wooden bucket was carried in, what with the warmth of the ward and the presence of specific diseases. If I have just said that the convict was supposed to undergo punishment even while ill, I did not mean that the rule had been established simply and solely for the purpose of punishment. That would certainly have been a senseless insinuation on my part. There was no need to punish the sick further. And since this was so, it must have been drastic necessity which forced the authorities to take such harmful measures. But the unpleasant truth is that there is only one likely reason which could even partially account for the necessity of this and many similar measures, so startling that it was impossible to explain them or even guess at their explanations. And so, what could the reason behind such cruelty have been? It was the mere supposition that a prisoner might feign illness, deceive the doctors, go to the lavatory at night and escape under cover of dark. It is hardly necessary to prove the absurdity of this idea. Where could a prisoner escape to? How could he escape? What could he escape in? In the day-time the prisoners were allowed out of the ward one by one and the same could be done at night. An armed sentry stood by the door, only two paces from the lavatory. In addition, a second guard accompanied the patient and kept a constant eye on him. There was only one window with double frames and iron bars, and another guard paced to and fro under this window all night. To get out this way, the two frames and the grating would first have to be removed. But who would let a prisoner do such a thing? Let us suppose that the would-be fugitive had killed the guard unnoticed by anyone, but granted even such an absurdity, the window-frames and the iron bars still remained to be broken. Note also that the ward watchers slept close by, less than ten paces from the

sentry and that another sentry stood by the door of the other ward with his helpmate and other ward watchers. And where could a prisoner have run to in the winter in slippers, dressing-gown and nightcap? If there was so little danger (no danger at all in fact), therefore, why harass the sick people so, some of them perhaps in the last hours of their lives and all of them needing fresh air even more than the healthy. Why indeed? That was something I never could understand.

But since I have already asked why, I cannot refrain from mentioning another puzzling question which haunted me for many years and to which I could never find the answer. I cannot help saying a few words about it before resuming my narration. I mean the fetters from which no illness could release the convict. I have seen even consumptives die in chains. Yet everybody seemed quite used to this and regarded it as something firmly established and not to be questioned. I doubt whether anyone ever so much as thought about it since it never occurred even to one of the doctors to intercede with the authorities to have the irons struck off a prisoner who was seriously ill, especially with consumption. Let us concede that the fetters are not unbearably heavy. They weigh between eight and twelve pounds and a healthy man can carry them without difficulty. I was told that after several years a man's feet begin to wither from the irons. How true this is I do not know, though it is not improbable. A weight of even no more than ten pounds fastened to one's foot for ever abnormally increases its weight and may produce a harmful effect eventually. But even if this does not matter to a healthy man, is it the same with the sick? And even if it does no harm to an ordinary sick man, what about those who are grievously ill, with consumption for instance, when arms and legs are so weak that even a straw becomes a burden? I really think that if the medical authorities

had managed to obtain relief for the consumptives alone, that would have been a great and true kindness. What if some evil-doer is unworthy of it? Must we aggravate the sufferings of those who have already been touched by the finger of God? It is indeed impossible to think that the only object of this evil was punishment. Is not the consumptive exempt from corporal punishment by law? Again it must be a matter of some mysterious importance, some salutary precaution, but what could it be? Surely nobody could seriously be afraid that the consumptive might run away. Who could harbour such an idea? Especially if we consider the advanced stage of the disease. And anyway, it is impossible to simulate consumption and deceive the doctors. It is not that sort of a disease; it can be detected at a glance. Moreover, is a convict put in irons to prevent or hamper his escape? Not at all. The fetters are meant to disgrace and humble him, to constitute a physical and moral burden. That, at least, is what they are supposed to do, but they can never hinder anybody's flight. The clumsiest convict could easily file through them or break off the rivet with a stone. The fetters can certainly prevent nothing, and if this is so and they are really intended as a punishment, then let me ask again: must dying men be punished?

As I write these lines, I clearly recall a dying man, that very Mikhailov whose bed stood near Ustyantsev's and opposite mine and who passed away, as I remember, on my fourth day in the ward. It is possible that in what I have put down about the consumptives I have been influenced by the impressions and thoughts which came to my mind at the time of his death. Incidentally, I did not know him very well. Mikhailov was still a young man, no more than twenty-five years old, tall, thin, and exceptionally pleasant-looking. He belonged to the special section, was queerly taciturn and always



sad in his quiet, mild way. He seemed to shrivel in prison, as the prisoners remarked, who later remembered him kindly. I recall only that he had very fine eyes and I really do not know why I remember him so distinctly. He died at about three in the afternoon one clear frosty day. I can still see the sun's strong slanting rays piercing the greenish window-panes lightly touched with hoar. A flood of light poured over the unhappy man. He was unconscious and his death agony was slow and painful, lasting for several hours. Since early morning he no longer recognized those who were near him. They wished to do something to relieve him. He was in great pain and his laboured breathing was deep and hoarse. His breast heaved as though he could not get enough air; he flung off the blanket and all the bedding and at last tried to tear off his shirt; even that seemed too heavy for him. He was helped to remove it. It was terrible to see that long body with its arms and legs wasted to mere bone, its sunken stomach and ribs protruding like those of a skeleton. There was nothing left on his naked body but a small wooden cross with an amulet and his fetters through which he might have withdrawn his ankles, so wasted did they seem. A hush came over the ward a half-hour before his death; even those who walked about tried to step noiselessly and spoke in whispers. What little talk there was concerned various irrelevant matters, and only occasional glances were cast at the dying man whose breathing grew steadily harsher. He clutched at the amulet with his straying hand and tried to tear it away as if it too were a burden. Someone removed it for him. About ten minutes later he died. The prisoners knocked on the door and informed the sentry. The watcher then came in, looked dully at the dead man and went to fetch the orderly. The orderly, a good young fellow a little too preoccupied with his appearance, which was not of the worst, it must

be admitted, soon entered the room, his resolute steps ringing through the hushed ward; he approached the dead man, felt for his pulse in that peculiar over-free manner which seemed especially adopted for the occasion, and left the room with a resigned wave of the hand. The guard was immediately informed: this was an important criminal from the special section and his death had to be established with due ceremony. While waiting for the guard, one of the convicts remarked in a whisper that it would be a good thing to close the dead man's eyes. Another listened to him attentively, then approached the bed and closed the eyes. He saw the cross lying on the pillow, picked it up, looked at it and silently replaced it on Mikhailov's neck. This done, he made the sign of the cross. The dead face was stiffening; a ray of sunlight played over it; the mouth was half open and two rows of young teeth gleamed between the thin, parched lips. The sergeant of the guard came in at last, wearing his sabre and helmet and followed by two sentries. He approached the bed, gradually shortening his steps and looking doubtfully at the silent prisoners watching him grimly on all sides. A step away from the bed he stood stock-still, as though too timid to come nearer. He seemed taken aback by the sight of that wasted body wearing nothing but its shackles. Suddenly he unbuckled his chin-strap, took off his helmet, which he was by no means required to do by the rules, and made the sign of the cross. He had a stern soldierly face with a grey moustache. I remember that Chekunov, another greyhead, was standing by. He had been staring straight into the sergeant's eyes and watching his every gesture with peculiar intensity. When their glances met, Chekunov's lower lip began to quiver, he curled it strangely, baring his teeth, and suddenly said with a quick, seemingly casual nod:

"He had a mother too, I suppose."

I remember that the words cut through me. What had made him say that, why had it occurred to him?

They lifted the corpse together with the bed; the straw rustled and the fetter chains rattled on the floor in the stillness. Someone picked them up and the body was carried away. Suddenly everybody was talking loudly. The sergeant could be heard outside the door; he was sending someone for the locksmith. The dead man had to have his irons struck off.

But I have digressed.

## II

### CONTINUED

The doctors made the rounds of the wards soon after ten in the morning. They all trooped together, the head doctor in the lead. The ward doctor came to see us about an hour and a half before. He was a young man, knew his work well and was kind and friendly. He was liked by the convicts who found but one shortcoming in him: he was too timid, they thought. It was true that he was not talkative and seemed even shy of us, almost to the point of blushing. He would increase a patient's rations almost as soon as requested and even seemed ready to prescribe the medicines at their own bidding. He was a nice young man, however. I must say that many doctors in Russia enjoy the love and respect of the common people. This is quite true as far as I have been able to observe. I realize that my words may sound paradoxical, especially in view of the Russian people's general mistrust of medicine and outlandish drugs. A simple man suffering from the grave disease would rather consult the old village leech or treat himself with some popular home-made remedy (by no means to be despised) than call on a doctor or enter

hospital. There is another reason besides, that has nothing to do with medicine at all, namely the general distrust of the populace of everything that bears the official stamp. Moreover, the people have been terrified of and prejudiced against the hospitals by all sorts of rumours often absurd, but sometimes not without foundation. Most of all, they fear the Prussian regime of the hospital, the strangers on all sides, the strict diets, the tales about the severity of orderlies and doctors, the cutting up of the corpses and so forth. Besides, they dislike being treated by gentlefolk and the doctors are gentlefolk after all. On closer acquaintance with the doctors, however, their fears are very quickly dispelled (not without exceptions, of course, but in the great majority of cases), which in my opinion reflects great credit on our doctors and especially on the younger ones. Most of them know how to gain the respect and even the devotion of the common people. I am writing about what I have seen and experienced for myself more than once and in many places; and I have no reason to think that it is different elsewhere. There may be some remote corners, of course, where doctors accept bribes and make a good thing out of their hospitals, neglecting their patients and gradually forgetting their professions altogether. Things like that still happen sometimes, but I am speaking of the general state, or rather of the spirit, the tendency of medicine today. Those apostates, wolves in the sheep folds, can never be justified whatever they may argue in their own defence—even if they claim that it is the *environment* that has ruined them, and especially if they have lost all love of humanity as well. For kindness, gentleness, and human sympathy are often more needful than any medicine. It is high time to stop our apathetic plaint that we have been destroyed by our environment. It is true that much within us has been affected, but not all,

while the subtle rogue often harks to the environment to justify not only his weakness, but often his meanness, especially if he has the gift of speech or writing. But I have digressed again: I merely wanted to say that the common people are mistrustful of and hostile to the medical officialdom rather than to the doctors. When they learn what the doctors are really like they quickly lose many of their prejudices. To this day, however, our hospitals fail in many respects to live up to the ways accepted among our common people and gain their trust and respect. Such at least is my opinion founded on some of my impressions.

Our ward doctor usually paused by each bed, examined each patient carefully, questioned him and prescribed his diet and treatment. Sometimes he could not help seeing that there was nothing wrong with the patient. The man had just come there for a rest from his labour to have a good sleep on a mattress instead of on bare boards and to be in a warm room instead of a damp guardhouse crowded with men under trial, all pale and wasted (throughout Russia, people awaiting sentence are almost always pale and wasted, a sign that their conditions and moral state are worse than those of the convicts), and our ward doctor would calmly enter the disease as *febris catarrhalis* or some such thing and let the man stay in bed for a week sometimes. *Febris catarrhalis* was a common joke. We knew very well that it was a formula adopted by tacit agreement to signify a case of "spare pangs" as the convicts called malinger. Sometimes the patient would take advantage of the doctor's tender-heartedness and would stay on until driven out. This was a trying situation for our ward doctor: he seemed embarrassed and ashamed to tell the patient bluntly that he ought to get well and ask for a discharge, though he, the ward doctor, had the full right to discharge the patient himself without much ado

by simply writing the words *sanat est* on his chart. Instead, he would first hint and then plead: "Isn't it nearly time for you to leave?" Or he would say: "You're almost well and it's rather crowded here," and so on until the patient grew ashamed and asked for a discharge. The head physician, though also a humane and honest man (the patients were fond of him too), was far stricter and more resolute than our ward doctor and on occasion could display especial sternness which gained him particular respect among the convicts. He appeared in the company of his assistants after our ward doctor had gone and, like him, examined every patient separately, spent much time at the bedside of the seriously ill for whom he could always find encouraging and often kindly words, leaving a pleasant grateful feeling behind. Nor did he reject those who came to the hospital with "spare pangs." But if the patient was too stubborn, he discharged him offhand. "Well, old man, you've been here long enough, but aren't you overdoing it?" The stubborn kind were usually the lazy workers, especially in the summer when the work was heavy, or the convicts awaiting sentence. I remember one severe, even cruel measure applied to one of them to make him leave the hospital. He had entered hospital with eye trouble: his eyes had been inflamed and he had complained of acute pain. He was treated with blisters and leeches; his eyes were sprayed with some solution and so on, but there was no improvement. It gradually dawned on the doctors that the man was simulating: the inflammation was slight and neither grew worse nor better—a suspicious sign. The convicts had long known that he had been shamming, though he had not admitted it to anyone. He was a young man, rather good-looking, but there was something unpleasant about him: he was furtive, suspicious, secretive, and forever scowling. I remember that it even occurred to some of us that

he might do something desperate. He was a soldier who had been caught at a large theft and was sentenced to a thousand strokes and the penal battalion. As I said before, the sentenced men resort to terrible expedients to postpone the dreaded moment. They might plunge a knife into some officer or a fellow convict and would have to be tried again with the result that their punishment would be postponed for some two months which was just what they wanted. They cared little that the punishment they had postponed would be much more severe when the time came. They were desperate to put off the fatal hour if even for a few days whatever the cost, and then be what may—so panic-stricken were they. Some of the convicts even whispered among themselves that we ought to be constantly on guard against him. He might stab someone at night. No one, however, took any precautions, not even his immediate neighbours. Some noticed that he rubbed his eyes at night with lime from the plaster and something else to get them inflamed by morning. Finally, the head physician threatened him with a seton. In prolonged diseases of the eye the doctors decide on this drastic and painful measure to save the sight when all other remedies have failed: they insert a seton much like the kind used on horses. But even then the poor wretch refused to recover. Was it obstinacy or merely faint-heartedness? A seton after all, though not as bad as the rods, was also extremely painful. The skin was gathered at the back of the patient's neck, a hole pierced through it and a linen tape almost finger-wide put through. Every day the tape was dragged backward and forward in order to break the wound open and keep it rankling. The poor wretch bore the most excruciating pain for several days before he would agree to the discharge. His eyes grew well in a single day and as soon as his neck healed he

went back to the guardhouse to face the thousand strokes on the next day.

Yes, the moment before the punishment is dreadful, so dreadful that it is perhaps sinful to call this fear of it faint-heartedness. It must be hard to bear if men prefer to incur double punishment if only to delay it for a time. I have also mentioned those who asked to be discharged even before their backs had fully healed from the first blows so as to receive the remaining strokes and be done with their punishment and their "on trial" position, which is much worse than their position would be in a convict prison. But apart from differences in temperament, the long habit of suffering beatings plays a large part in the fearlessness and resolution of some of these men. Both the back and the spirit of the man who has been repeatedly beaten become hardened, as it were, so that at last he comes to regard such punishment as something of a minor inconvenience and no longer fears it. Yes, it is quite true. One of our prisoners from the special section, a baptized Kalmyk whose name was Alexander, but who was commonly called Alexandra, an odd fellow, mischievous, fearless, yet good-natured, told me how he had endured his four thousand; he spoke of it laughing and joking, but also assured me very gravely that if he had not grown up in his tribe from his tenderest years under the lash, the marks of which were permanently on his back, he would never have stood those four thousand strokes. It seemed to me that he was almost ready to bless that upbringing he had received under the whip. "I was beaten for everything, Alexander Petrovich," he told me as he sat on my bunk one evening before the lights were lit. "I was beaten for fifteen years, from the first day I can remember. Everybody used to beat me who felt like it—several times a day—so that in the end I got quite used to it." How he came to be a soldier I do not know. I do not



think that he ever told me. He was a born vagabond and fugitive. I only remember his story of how he was sentenced to four thousand strokes for the murder of his officer and had been mortally afraid of it. "I knew they would make it as hot for me as they could, that they would try to beat me to death. I was used to beatings, but four thousand strokes is no joke. And all the chiefs were very angry. I knew that this would cost me dearly. They would not let me off alive. I thought that I would help things by getting baptized, though my comrades said this would not help at all—they would not forgive me whatever I did. Still, why not try, I thought? They ought to be sorrier for a Christian. And so I was baptized and got the name of Alexander. But the beating was the same beating; they did not spare me a single stroke. Wasn't I angry after that! Just you wait, I thought to myself. I'll cheat the lot of you yet. And so I did, Alexander Petrovich, you may believe me or not. I was very good at shamming dead, not quite dead of course, but just as though I were about to give up the ghost any minute. When they gave me the first thousand I yelled as if I were burning up; by the end of the second I thought that my end had come: my head was all in a daze and my legs just crumpled up; and so down I fell to the ground. My eyes rolled up, my face was blue and I was not breathing, only foaming at the mouth. The doctor looked at me and said that I was going to die that very minute. They carried me into the hospital and I came round straight away. They took me out twice more and were even angrier than the first time, but I fooled them again and once again. When I was through with the third thousand I dropped as if dead again, but as for the fourth, every stroke was like a knife and seemed as bad as three: so hard did they lay them on. They were mad with anger by that time. That cursed last thousand! It was as

bad as the first three put together. If I hadn't played dead when only two hundred were left I would never have pulled through. But I did not let them get the best of me. They were fooled again and how could they help it when the doctor was taken in himself. They wanted to take it out in the last two hundred and these were really worse than two thousand, but it didn't do them any good. I was still alive. And why? Because I was brought up on the whip from the time I was a child. That's why I'm alive today. My, did I get a lot of beatings in my time!" he added with a soft quaver, as though trying to remember all the times he had been beaten. "No, I can't tell you how many times I've been punished," he added after a pause. "Nobody can count that much." He looked at me and laughed so good-naturedly that I could not help smiling. "Do you know, all my dreams are about beatings, Alexander Petrovich. I never have any other kind." Actually, he often howled in his sleep at the top of his voice so that the others had to push him awake: "What the hell are you yelling about?" He was a robust man of forty-five, of medium height, fidgety, and cheerful, and got on splendidly with everybody. And if he was light-fingered and was often thrashed for it, who among the convicts had not been caught stealing at one time or another and beaten for it?

I will add another observation: I was always astonished at the extraordinary good nature and lack of malice with which the men spoke of their beatings and of those who had beaten them. Very often I could not detect the slightest shade of resentment or hatred in their stories the horror of which made my heart thump wildly, while they would be laughing about it like children. I remember M-sky telling me about his punishment. He was not a nobleman and had received five hundred strokes. I had heard this from others and asked him whether it was true and how he had endured it. He an-

swered very briefly like a man suffering from some deep-seated pain, flushing and avoiding my eye. When he did look at me, his eyes burned with hatred and his lips trembled with indignation. He would never forget that page in his past, I felt. Now our convicts (I cannot vouch that there were no exceptions) of course regarded this matter quite differently. It could not be, I sometimes thought, that they believed that they had deserved their punishments, especially as their acts of violence had not been directed so much against their fellow-men as against the authorities. Most of them did not blame themselves at all. As I have already said, I saw no evidence of remorse even when the victims of the crime had been their own people. Crimes against the authorities, therefore, were hardly worth mentioning. It seemed to me sometimes that in the latter case they had their own practical or rather realistic way of looking at things. They set things down to destiny, to the hard facts, did not ponder on it but accepted it unconsciously, as a kind of faith. The convict, for example, always feels inclined to find a justification for himself when he has committed a crime against the authorities, so much so that the question of guilt never even occurs to him. Still, he realizes that the authorities must regard his crime in quite a different light and had consequently to punish him; that made them quits. It was simply a matter of mutual struggle. The criminal knew besides that he was justified in the eyes of the common people who would never condemn him altogether, but on the contrary would be ready to exonerate him in most cases, as long as his crime was not directed against his own kind, the common people to whom he belonged. So his conscience was at peace and he was strong in the assurance of his conscience and morally undisturbed, which was the main thing. And since he felt that he had something to rely on, he did not hate, but accepted the inevitable course

of things, a course which he had neither begun nor would end and which would continue for a long, long time in this passive yet desperate struggle. What soldier hates the Turks with whom he is at war? Even if the Turk shoots him or cuts him down.

Not all the stories were told in cold blood, however. The convicts spoke of Lieutenant Zherybyatnikov, for example, with a shade, though not too strong, of indignation. I had come to know Zherybyatnikov from what the prisoners told me about him when I was in hospital the first time. Later, I saw him once when he was on sentry duty. He was a tall fat man not yet thirty with puffy red cheeks, flashing teeth and a hearty guffaw. It was evident from his face that thought troubled him less than anyone else in the world. He had a passion for supervising rods and floggings. I hasten to add that even then I regarded the lieutenant as a freak among his kind as did the other prisoners. There were others besides him of course in those old days "fresh in our memories but hard to conceive" who fulfilled such duties with great zeal. But mostly, they did it out of simplicity and without special enthusiasm. The lieutenant on the other hand was something of a connoisseur and loved the executioner's art for its own sake. He revelled in it and like some Roman patrician, jaded and worn out with overindulgence, invented various refined and perverse variations to tickle his imagination and provide some excitement for his soul cushioned in fat. When a prisoner was brought on for execution Zherybyatnikov was thrilled by a mere glance at the long rows of men with stout sticks in their hands. He would smugly walk down the ranks urging each man to do his duty with zeal and devotion or else— But the soldiers very well knew what *or else* meant. If the culprit was not acquainted with the lieutenant's tricks, something like the following might happen to him (needless to say, the lieu-

tenant's ingenuity was inexhaustible). After he had been stripped and his arms had been tied to the rifle stocks by which the sergeants would drag him through the Green Street, the prisoner, following the established custom, began tearfully to implore the officer in charge to make the punishment lighter and not be excessively severe. "Your Honour!" the wretch would cry, "spare me and be a father to me. I'll remember you in my prayers all my life. Have mercy on me!" Zherebyatnikov would be waiting just for this. He would instantly stop the procedure and begin to talk with the prisoner in a very sentimental vein.

"But what am I to do, my friend? It's the law that punishes you, not I."

"Everything is in your hands, your Honour! Be merciful!"

"Do you think I am not sorry for you? Do you think that it is a pleasure to watch you being beaten? Am I not a man? Am I or am I not, tell me!"

"Of course, your Honour. How else could it be? You are our father and we your children. Be a father to me!" the convict cries with a glimmer of hope.

"But, my friend, think for yourself! That's what your head is for! Don't I understand that as a man I must look upon you with compassion and forbearance, sinner though you are!"

"It's the Gospel truth, your Honour."

"Yes, with forbearance, however guilty you are. Still, it's not I who decide but the law. Just think of my position: I must serve God and my country and would be taking a grievous sin upon myself if I were to weaken the law! Just think about it."

"Your Honour!"

"Well, so be it. I'll do it for your sake alone. I know I shouldn't, but just this once. I will spare you this time and the punishment will be light. But what if it does you

more harm than good? If I take pity on you and punish you lightly, you will hope that it will be the same next time and commit another crime. What then? It will be on my conscience."

"Your Honour! I'll swear by my friends and enemies. As God in heaven is my witness!"

"There, there, that's enough! Will you promise that you'll do no wrong in the future?"

"May God strike me dead, may I in the other world—"

"Don't swear, it's sinful. I'll take your word for it."

"Your Honour!"

"Well then, I'll spare you because of your orphan tears. You're an orphan, aren't you?"

"Yes, your Honour, all alone in the world without father or mother."

"So be it—for your orphan tears, but mind that it's the last time. Lead him on," he would add in such a tender tone that the prisoner hardly knew how to thank God for having sent him such a kind man. But now the ominous procession moved, the drum struck up and the first rods were raised. "Let him have it," Zherebyatnikov would suddenly shout at the top of his voice. "Lay into him! Give him more! Make it hot for the orphan! Cut the scoundrel down!" And the soldiers struck out with all their might so that sparks seemed to flash before the eyes of the poor screaming wretch, while Zherebyatnikov ran after him between the columns roaring with laughter, helpless with laughter, holding his sides with laughter, doubled up with laughter, almost pitiful with laughter. He enjoyed it so and it seemed so funny to him. Only between breaks of his gusty laughter he could keep up the cry: "Lay on! Flay him, the scoundrel, flay him, the orphan!"

Or there was another variation: the punishment was

about to begin and the convict would be pleading for mercy. This time, however, Zheryatyatnikov would not assume the sorrowful tone, but be blunt and brisk.

"You see, my dear fellow, I shall punish you as I ought to because you deserve it," he would say. "There is only one thing I can do for you: I won't have you tied to the rifle butts. You shall go alone: run as fast as you can through the whole line. Every stick will strike you all the same, but then it will be quicker. Would you like to try it?"

The prisoner would listen, puzzled, mistrustful, and think: "Perhaps it really would be better to run through," he would say to himself. "I'll run with all my might and get through it five times quicker and perhaps some of them will miss."

"All right, your Honour, I agree."

"So do I. Be off with you. Look sharp!" he would call to the soldiers, though he very well knew that not a blow would miss the culprit's back because each of the soldiers knew what would happen if it did. The prisoner ran as fast as he could through the Green Street, but got no farther than fifteen rods, because the sticks came crashing on his back like hail; the poor man would fall flat with a cry as though stopped by a bullet. "No, your Honour, the regulation way is the best," he would say raising himself from the ground pale and shaking. And Zheryatyatnikov who knew it all along would roar with laughter. It would take too long to describe all his amusements and all that the prisoners told me about him.

The prisoners talked in a rather different tone and spirit of a certain Lieutenant Smekalov who had fulfilled the duties of commandant before our major received his appointment. Though Zheryatyatnikov was remembered without special bitterness, his exploits were certainly neither admired nor praised, the man was loathed, even looked down upon. Now Lieutenant Smekalov

was remembered with something like pleasure. He was not fond of flogging and had no traces of the Zherebyatnikov qualities. Still, he was not altogether averse to flogging, but even these punishments carried out under his orders were remembered with something akin to affection, so greatly did he please the convicts. How did he earn such popularity? It is true that the convicts, like all Russian people, were ready to forget all torments for a single word of kindness; I merely mention the fact without comment, favourable or otherwise. It was not difficult to please such people and gain their approval, but Smekalov won favour to the point where even his floggings brought memories that were almost sentimental. "He was better than a father to us," the prisoners would say with a sigh, comparing him with the present major. "A treasure of a man!" He must have been a very affable and kind man in a way, but sometimes a man in authority is not only kind, but even generous and still fails to be liked and is sometimes even laughed at. The fact was that Smekalov managed to make the prisoners regard him as one of their own kind and this is a great skill or more exactly inborn talent which those who possess it hardly ever stop to consider. Strangely enough, they are not good people at all sometimes; yet they manage to gain popularity nonetheless. They are not squeamish about the convicts and that, I think, is the reason. They never look or sound like gentlemen and have a special inborn flavour of the common people who are, God knows, so sensitive to it. What won't they sacrifice for it. They will exchange the most compassionate of men for the most severe taskmaster if he has their own particular homely flavour. And if the man happens to be good-natured as well, then there is none better indeed. Lieutenant Smekalov, as I have said, inflicted severe punishment sometimes, but managed to do it in such a way that no one bore him a grudge. On the contrary,



in my day, a long time afterwards, his *tricks* were even remembered with pleasure and laughter. His tricks were not many, however; he was not imaginative enough. He had only one joke, in fact, one alone, the joke with which he amused himself for almost a year. Perhaps it was especially dear to him just because it was his only one. There was much simplicity in it too. When a prisoner was brought for a flogging, Smekalov would come to the place of execution, smiling, joking, and asking the victim about his private and personal affairs in the prison, doing this not to play with him, but *because he was really interested*. The sticks would be brought and a chair for Smekalov. He would sit down and even light his pipe. He had one of those long-stemmed pipes. The prisoner would begin to beg for mercy, of course. "Oh, no, brother, don't waste your breath," Smekalov would say, and the prisoner sighing despondently lay down. "But perhaps you could recite such and such a verse to me? Do you know your prayers?" "Of course I do, your Honour. We're Christians and were taught them as children." "Well, say it then!" The prisoner already knew just what to recite and what to expect when he did so, because the jest had been repeated at least thirty times before. And Smekalov, too, knew that the prisoner knew and that even the soldiers waiting with their sticks had known it long ago. For all that, he would repeat it again and again, so delighted was he with it—perhaps just because he was its undisputed author and it was just a matter of authorship's vanity. The prisoner began to recite, the men with the rods waiting, and Smekalov leaning forward, his hand raised and even forgetting to draw at his pipe—all attention. The prisoner came to the words: "Hallowed be thy name," just what Smekalov was waiting for. "Stop!" he would shout and blazing with inspiration command the man with his stick raised: "Now give him the canel!"

And he would laugh happily. The soldiers would grin too as would the one who was holding the rod. Even the victim would nearly grin, though the stick would break through his flesh in an instant. Smekalov for his part was full of joy because he had thought it all out so happily: "Hallowed be thy name" and "Now give him the cane"—how apt it was and how well it rhymed! And he would leave the scene thoroughly pleased with himself. The victim, his punishment over, would go away almost pleased with himself and with Smekalov, and half an hour later he would be telling the others about how the joke of thirty times before had now been repeated for the thirty-first. "He's a rare man. Full of fun he is."

At times, the reminiscences about this kindest of lieutenants smacked of Manilov.\*

"You'd be going somewhere," one prisoner would say, his face beaming, "and he would be sitting there at the window in his dressing-gown, drinking his tea and smoking his pipe. You would take off your cap of course and he would ask: 'Where are you going?' 'To work, Mikhail Vasilyevich. I have to go to the workshop first.' And he would laugh. He was a rare man, he was."

"We won't get another like him," one of the listeners would add.

### III

#### CONTINUED\*\*

I spoke about punishment and the people in charge of this interesting procedure mainly because it was only when I was in hospital that I got a first-hand under-

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\* A character from Gogol's *Dead Souls* known for his sugary sentimentality.—*Tr.*

\*\* All I write here of punishments and executions refers to my time. Everything changed now, they say.—*Author's note.*

standing of it. Before that, I had known of it only by hearsay. Those who had run the gauntlet were brought to our hospital whether they came from the battalions, the convict troops or other military stations in our town or the countryside. In those first days when my mind was still busy absorbing whatever was happening around me, I was naturally impressed most poignantly with all that strange routine and all those men who had already undergone or were as yet awaiting punishment. I was agitated, disturbed and frightened. I remember that I suddenly began to probe eagerly into all the details, to listen to all the stories on that score, ask questions and try to arrive at some conclusion. Among other things, I wanted to know all the degrees of punishment and execution and how the prisoners regarded them. I was trying to picture the state of a man going to his punishment. I have already said that hardly anybody was calm before an execution, not excluding those who had been beaten often and severely. The man would be seized by an agonizing, sheerly physical terror, which completely overwhelmed his moral nature. Even later, throughout my term, I could not help watching those condemned men who, having spent some time in hospital after the execution of the first part of their sentence, were discharged to undergo the remainder of their strokes. The division of the punishment in two parts was always done on the advice of the doctor who was present at the execution. If the number of strokes was too great and the prisoner could not endure them all at once, they were divided into two or even three portions according to the doctor's verdict, since he alone could tell whether or not the victim could stand the remainder. Usually five hundred, a thousand or even fifteen hundred strokes were inflicted in one portion. But if the sentence called for two or three thousand, it was split up into two or three stages. Those who were about to leave the hospital to

undergo the next stage of their punishment were extremely depressed, morose, and silent. They seemed to be in a kind of stupor, their minds unnaturally vacant. They never joined the conversation and, for the most part, did not speak at all. The curious thing was that the other prisoners did not talk to them either and tried to avoid all mention of what was awaiting them. There was not a single superfluous word or attempt to comfort. There was a general and clearly defined effort to avoid taking notice of the condemned man and this, of course, was best for him. There were exceptions, like Orlov, the man whom I mentioned before. After the first part of his punishment there was only one thing that annoyed him—his back took too long to heal and he could not get discharged as soon as he would like, something that delayed the remainder of his sentence and his contemplated escape on the way to his place of future exile. His intention must have heartened him and God knows what else he had on his mind. His was a very passionate nature, tenacious of life. He was in hopeful spirits and even excited, though he tried to conceal his emotion. The reason was that before he went through the first half of his punishment he had thought that he would not escape alive and would die under the rods. He had heard various rumours of the measures taken by the authorities against him while he was still on trial and even then had thought himself doomed. But he took heart when he survived the first portion of his strokes. He came to the hospital more dead than alive—I had never before seen such wounds, but he was actually exulting and full of hope that he would survive, because the rumours had proved false. He had come through after all! And now, after the long period in which he had been under trial, he was again dreaming of the road, of escape, of freedom, of the forests and the steppes. Two days after his discharge, he died in the same hospital and indeed in the same bed, having been

unable to survive the second portion of his punishment. But I have mentioned this before.

Yet those same prisoners whose days and nights were so troubled before their punishment bore the execution manfully, not excluding the most faint-hearted. I rarely heard a groan even from those who were seriously injured on the first day of their arrival. Those men knew how to endure pain. I asked them many questions about this. I wanted to know how great the pain was, what it was really like. I honestly do not know why I was so eager to know. I remember, however, that it was not idle curiosity. I repeat that I was badly shaken, but no matter whom I asked, I could get no definite answer. "It stings, it scorches like fire," was the inevitable answer. When I came to know M-sky better, early in my term, I asked him too. "It is very painful," he answered. "It's just like a burn, as if your back were being scorched over a hot fire." Everybody expressed the same thought. I made one curious observation, though. How accurate it is I do not know, but the general opinion of the convicts seemed to support it: the rods, if a large number of strokes are inflicted, is the severest punishment in Russia. On the surface of it, this would seem absurd and impossible. But the fact is that a man may be flogged to death with five hundred and even four hundred strokes of the rods and when there are more than five hundred, death is almost a certainty. The strongest could not endure a thousand strokes at a time. Five hundred strokes of the stick on the other hand can be borne without the slightest danger to life. Even a man who is not so strong can endure a thousand without risk. Even two thousand will not kill a man of moderate strength and health. The convicts all claimed that the rods were worse than the sticks. "They sting harder," they would say. "The pain is worse." And it must have been true. The rod exacerbates far more, affects the nerves more strongly, shaking them

beyond human endurance. How things are today, I cannot say, but in the good old days there were gentlemen to whom the power of flogging gave a satisfaction resembling that of the Marquis de Sade or Madame de Brinvilliers. I imagine that there was something in this sensation that made these gentlemen's hearts swoon with pain and pleasure. There are people who thirst for blood like tigers. Any man who has once tasted this unlimited power over the blood, over the body and spirit of a human creature like himself, a creature created in the same image and subject to the same law of Christ; any man who has tasted this power, this boundless opportunity to humiliate most bitterly another being made in the image of God—becomes the servant instead of the master of his own emotions. Tyranny is a habit. It can and does eventually develop into a disease. I believe that the best of men may grow coarse, degrade to the level of a beast by sheer force of habit. Blood and power intoxicate one, they develop callousness and lust. The greatest perversions grow finally acceptable and even delicious to mind and heart. The man and the citizen perish in the tyrant for ever and the return to human dignity, remorse and spiritual rebirth becomes scarcely possible to him. Besides, the example and mere possibility of arbitrary power are contagious; they are indeed a great temptation. A society which regards such things calmly is already corrupt at the roots. In short, the right to inflict corporal punishment is one of the ulcers of society, one of the most powerful means of destroying every sprout of civil conscience, every attempt to enhance it, and is the essential cause of its certain and inevitable decomposition.

Society scorns the professional executioner, but not the gentleman amateur. It was only recently that a contradictory view has been expressed and then only in books and mere abstractions. Even those who expressed it have

not yet succeeded in stifling the lust for power in themselves. Even the manufacturer or employer takes subtle pleasure in the fact that his workmen and their families are wholly dependent on him. This is bound to be so. A generation does not so quickly uproot what has been implanted in it by heredity. A man cannot so soon renounce that which has entered his blood with his mother's milk, so to speak; fundamental changes are not so quickly accomplished. It is far too little to recognize one's own guilt and ancestral sin. One must yet break oneself of the habit; and this takes time.

Speaking of the executioner, one may observe that traces of his nature are to be found in nearly any man today. These bestial traces, however, are not equally developed in all. If they overwhelm all the other qualities of a man, he of course grows terrible, monstrous. There are two kinds of executioners: some are such by their own choice and others because they are forced to be such. The voluntary executioner is of course baser in all respects than his professional counterpart. Yet it is the professional the people loathe. Their loathing reaches the point of terror, nausea, and almost mystical horror. But why this almost superstitious fear of the executioner and this sheer indifference and near approval of the amateur? There are some very strange examples. I have known people who were decent, honourable and even respected in society, yet could not complacently endure the fact that the culprit did not shriek under the rods and beg for mercy. He simply had to shriek and beg for mercy. He was supposed to do that—it was both seemly and essential. When the victim refused to shriek, an officer whom I knew—one who might otherwise have been considered a kindly man—took this as a personal affront. He had meant to make the punishment light, but failing to hear the usual “be a father to me, your Honour! Spare me and I will pray for you for ever!” and

so on, he flew into a rage and ordered fifty extra strokes to hear the shrieks and prayers—which he did. “He can’t behave that way. That’s sheer brazenness,” he explained to me very seriously. As for the professional executioner, the man who is forced to be one, his is the usual story. He was once a condemned prisoner himself, afterwards sentenced to exile, but retained as an executioner. At the beginning, he acts as an apprentice and when he has learned the art he is kept for life in prison where he lives in a house all by himself, but still under guard. A living man is not a machine of course. He flogs others because he must, but there are times when he also may be carried away. For all that he hardly ever feels any personal hatred for his victim. The skill of his hand, his expertness, and the desire to impress his helpmates and the public all serve to excite his vanity. He tries his best for the sake of his art. Besides, he very well knows that he is an outcast and that superstitious terror follows him everywhere; and perhaps this too increases his ferocity and bestial trend. Even children say that “the executioner renounced his father and mother.” Strangely enough, all executioners I have come across were fairly intelligent and sensible men with great dignity and even pride. Had this pride developed as a reaction to the general contempt? Or had it sprung from the consciousness of power over their victims and the terror they inspired? Which it was I do not know. Perhaps the very dramatism and ostentation with which they appear before the public on the scaffold increases their haughtiness. I remember a certain executioner I made a close study of. He was a lean, muscular man of middle height, about forty years old, with curly hair and a face that was quite pleasant and intelligent. Always very grave and sedate, he bore himself like a gentleman and answered my questions briefly, sensibly, and even amiably, though with a somewhat arrogant amiability, as though he looked down



on me. The officer of the guard often talked to him in my presence with something like respect, it seemed to me. The executioner must have been aware of this and when anyone in authority addressed him, redoubled his politeness, dryness and stood on his dignity even more. The more affable a superior was to him, the more stiff-necked he seemed to grow. And though he still spoke politely, I am sure he believed himself immeasurably above his chief. It was written all over him. He was sent out under guard on a hot summer day to destroy the town's dogs with a long thin pole. There was a host of stray dogs which multiplied with extreme rapidity. They grew dangerous in the heat of summer and the authorities, therefore, ordered the executioner to destroy them. But even this degrading task did not seem to humiliate him. He went about the streets with great dignity in the company of his weary guard, frightening the women and children by his appearance and turning a calm and even condescending eye on everybody he met.

The executioner's life is an easy one, however. He always has money, good food, and vodka. The money comes to him in bribes. The civilian who has been sentenced will take great pains to give the executioner a present beforehand even if it takes his last kopek. The executioner sometimes fixes the sum according to the probable means of the convict if the latter is rich enough. He may take as much as thirty rubles or even more. There is often a great deal of bickering. The executioner cannot, of course, make his blows too light as he would have to answer for this with his own back. But in return for a bribe, he promises not to make the punishment excessively severe. His proposal is scarcely ever rejected. If it is, he may make the punishment really barbarous, which is entirely within his power. It may happen that he demands a large sum from a poor man. In that event, the relatives will come to him, bargaining and humbling

themselves, and woe to the victim if they fail to satisfy the henchman. The superstitious terror he inspires is very useful to him. What wild tales are not told about him! The prisoners, however, assured me that he could kill a man with one blow if he chose. I do not know whether this has ever happened. It might, of course. At any rate, it was told with great conviction. One executioner indeed swore to me that he could do it. I also heard that he could deal a swinging blow at the criminal's back without leaving a scratch, so that the criminal would not feel the slightest pain. But there have been too many stories about such things. Even if the executioner does receive a bribe, his first blow must always be heavy. This has become a custom of long standing among them. He may soften the following blows, especially if he has been paid in advance, but never the first. Why, I do not know. He does it perhaps to prepare the victim for further strokes which will be less painful by comparison. Or it may simply be the desire to show off before his victim, to strike terror into him, to stun him at the first instant and to make him realize whom he is dealing with. Be it as it may, the executioner is in a state of exultation as the punishment is about to begin. He is an actor, conscious of his strength and posing before his audience filled with wonder and horror. It is certainly not without some pleasure that he sings out the familiar ominous words: "Take care! Here goes!" In short, it is difficult to conceive to what extent human nature may be perverted.

I listened avidly to the tales of many prisoners in those early days in hospital. Lying in bed was terribly boring. All the days were alike. The doctors' visits in the morning and dinner soon afterwards distracted us somewhat. Food, of course, was also a major distraction. The diet depended on the patient's illness. Some had only soup with groats, others only gruel, and still others only a semolina porridge which was rather a luxury. The

prisoner grew soft with long lying abed and developed a taste for dainties. Those who were convalescent were given a piece of boiled beef or "bull" as it was called. The best diet was that of the scurvy patients—beef with onions, horse-radish, and so on—and sometimes even a dram of vodka. The bread was black or half wheat, depending on the illness, and always well baked. The formalism and subtlety of diet prescription amused the patients. Some patients were too ill to eat at all, of course. But those who had an appetite could eat what they liked. Some exchanged their food so that a diet prescribed for one illness went to a case of quite a different kind. Others who were on a strict diet bought beef and other food prescribed for scurvy, and drank rank kvass and beer, likewise bought from other patients. Some even ate the portions of two. The rations were sold and resold. The portions containing beef were especially expensive—five kopeks. If there was no one who would sell his food in our ward, the guard would be sent to the other prison ward and if he drew a blank there too, into the "free" wards until some seller could be found. Some were left with nothing but bread to eat, acquiring a bit of money instead. Poverty, of course, was universal, but those who had a few coppers would send even as far as the market for white loaves and other dainties. The guards ran all these errands quite disinterestedly. Boredom at its worst set in after dinner. Some would sleep for nothing better to do, some would gossip or wrangle with one another or tell stories. It would be even duller if no new patients were brought in. The arrival of a new-comer never failed to create a stir, especially if he was a complete stranger. He would be looked over and asked who and what he was, where he had come from and what his crime was. Men who were on the march to other prisons were particularly interesting. They always had stories to tell apart from their personal affairs, which was something

one did not ask about if the man did not volunteer the information himself. The questions were: where had his convoy come from? Who was in it? By which route had they come? Where were they going? As they listened to the new-comer's tales, the prisoners casually recalled events of their own past—prison convoys, forced marches, executioners, and officers in charge. Men who had run the gauntlet also used to be brought in late in the afternoon. As I have said before, their arrival always had a marked effect on the patients. But after all, they were not brought in every day, and when they were not the time seemed to drag especially slowly. Everybody seemed to get on everybody else's nerves and there were quarrels. We were even glad to see lunatics who were sent in for examination. The ruse of feigning madness to escape punishment was occasionally resorted to. Some were quickly exposed or rather they themselves decided to change their method and after being wild for several days, would suddenly calm down and gloomily ask to be discharged. Neither the prisoners nor the doctors reproached such a man or tried to shame him. The doctors discharged him without comment and he was led away to return a few days later, after his punishment. Such cases were rare, however. The genuine lunatics, on the other hand, were truly a plague to the entire ward. Some of them who were over-lively and talkative, given to shouting, weeping or singing, were at first almost made welcome. "What fun!" they would say, watching some newly-arrived bedlamite. I, however, was terribly pained and shocked to see these wretches. I could never look at madmen unmoved. Soon, however, the endless grimaces and outrages of the patient who had been greeted with laughter grew decidedly tiresome to everybody and in a day or two brought everyone to the end of his patience. One of them was kept in the ward for three weeks and I felt like running away from the place. To make

things worse, another mental patient was brought in. The latter made a particularly deep impression on me. I had been in prison for three years then. When I had been in my first year or rather in the very first months of my prison life, in the spring, I used to go to work with a gang walking a distance of two versts or so to a brick yard to help at the kilns. We had to repair the kilns where bricks were to be made in the summer. At the works one morning M-sky and B. introduced me to Sergeant Ostrozhsky, an overseer, who lived there. He was a Pole of about sixty, tall and lean, uncommonly dignified and even majestic in his appearance. He had been with the army in Siberia for a very long time and though of peasant origin (he had come to Siberia as a private after the Polish uprising of 1830), was greatly respected and liked by M-sky and B. He was forever reading his Catholic prayer book. He talked pleasantly, sensibly, had such interesting things to say and seemed kind and honest. I did not see him for two years after that and all I knew was that he had been arrested for some offence. But now, suddenly, he was brought into our ward as a madman. He came in shrieking and laughing wildly and began to dance, striking the most uncouth and rakish postures. The convicts were pleased with this at first, but I grew very sad. In three days, we did not know what to do with him. He was constantly wrangling, fighting, shrieking, and singing even at night. Some of the things he did, moreover, were so disgusting that everybody was sick. He could not be restrained. When he was put into a strait-jacket, he grew even more difficult, though without it he had wrangled and fought with everybody. Several times, the whole ward begged the head physician in a body to remove our affliction to the other prison ward. But after a day or two, the patients of the other ward begged the doctor to put him back with us. And since we had two madmen, both of them violent, our two

wards went on exchanging them, turn and turn about. Each seemed worse than the other. We breathed freely only when they were taken away at last.

I remember another strange man. Once, in midsummer, a convict awaiting sentence was brought in; he was a robust and rather uncouth man of about forty-five with a badly pock-marked face, little red eyes sunken in fat and an extremely sullen expression. He was assigned the bed next to mine. At first he seemed very quiet, talked to nobody and sat on his cot as though pondering something. It was growing dark when he suddenly turned to me and with an air of secrecy began to tell me that he had been condemned to two thousand strokes, but that now it did not matter because the daughter of a certain colonel had interceded for him. I looked at him doubtfully and said that I did not think that the colonel's daughter could help very much. I did not know his condition for he had been brought in as an ordinary patient. When I asked him what his illness was, he said that he did not know. He had been sent here for some reason or other though he was quite well. The colonel's daughter, he claimed, was in love with him: two weeks before she had happened to be driving past the guardhouse when he was looking through his small barred window, and she had fallen in love with him at first sight. Since then, she had come to the guardhouse three times on various pretexts. The first time, she had come with her father ostensibly to visit her brother who was on guard duty. Another time, she had come with her mother on the plea of distributing alms and had whispered to him as she whisked past that she loved him and would save him. It was strange to hear all that gibberish told in such minute detail. All this, of course, was a mere figment of his disordered brain, but he religiously believed in this path of escape from punishment. Calmly and confidently he spoke of the young lady's passion for him; the story was

not merely absurd—it was uncanny to listen to a tale of a lovelorn maiden told by a man who was almost fifty and had such a dispirited look on his ugly face. It was strange to see what havoc terror had done to his timid soul. Perhaps he had really seen something through that window and the madness born of his fear suddenly found its form and outlet. This unhappy soldier, who had never once given a thought to young ladies, had suddenly invented a romance, as a last straw at which he instinctively clutched. I heard him without comment and told some of the other convicts about it. But when they grew inquisitive, he bashfully held his peace. The doctor questioned him on the next day, but he complained of nothing and since an examination seemed to show that this was so, he was discharged. We did not learn that *sanat* had been put in his card until the doctors had left, so that we could not tell them where the real trouble lay. Besides, we did not fully realize either just what was wrong with the man. The whole thing happened through an error of the man in charge who had sent him to the ward without explaining the reason. It was simply a matter of negligence. Or perhaps those who had sent him were merely suspicious and far from convinced of his madness; perhaps they wanted verification. Anyway, the man underwent his punishment two days later. He seemed to have been in a stupor all the time and did not believe that he would be punished to the very last minute. When they did lead him down the line, he began to cry for help. When he came back to the hospital he was put into the other ward because there was no vacant bed in ours. I made inquiries about him and learned that he did not say a word to anyone for a whole week and seemed completely bewildered and depressed. When his back was healed he was sent away and I never heard of him again.

As for the medical treatment we received, those who were only slightly ill neither followed the doctor's orders

nor took his pills as far as I could see. But those who were really ill took great interest in their treatment and took their medicines exactly as told. The external remedies were liked best of all. The common people are impressed by poultices, cupping-glasses, leeches, and blood-lettings and the convicts accepted these willingly and even with pleasure. Curiously enough, those same convicts, who so patiently bore the agony of the stick or the rod, complained, groaned, and grimaced bitterly when they had to undergo a cupping. It was either that they had grown soft or were just clowning. It is true that our cuppings were of a special kind. The little instrument for incisions had been lost or broken a long time ago so that the skin had to be cut with a lancet, something like twelve cuts for each cupping-glass. This is not painful when the proper instrument is used. Twelve little pins would dart out and the thing would be done. Now a lancet cuts comparatively slowly and there is pain. Since one hundred and twenty cuts had to be made for one treatment, it was rather painful on the whole. I myself had experienced this and it hurt of course, but not so badly as to groan. It was even comical sometimes to watch a big strong man squirm and whimper. It might be compared with what happens when a man firm and composed in a serious matter mopes and goes into tantrums at home if there is nothing for him to do. He will whine over his food, quarrel with everybody, finding everyone rude and annoying, and, in short, "the fat went to his head," as is sometimes said of such gentlemen and may be said of some of the common people, too, especially of a great many of the convicts. Sometimes, even his ward companions began to tease the molly-coddle or simply curse him. And he would stop his nonsense at once as though he had been waiting for the scolding to be quiet. Ustyantsev particularly disliked that sort and never missed an opportunity of quarrelling with one of them. In



fact, he hardly ever missed the opportunity to quarrel with anybody. This was both a pleasure and necessity to him, doubtless because of his illness, but also from his obtuseness. He would at first stare solemnly at his victim and then read him a lecture in a calm confident voice; he was a real busy-body as though duty-bound to keep an eye on our discipline and morals.

"He butts into everything," the convicts would say laughing. They pitied him, however, avoided quarrelling with him and merely poked fun.

"He buzzes on and on, doesn't he?"

"What do you mean? Why should I doff my cap to a fool? But why should he yell just because of a little lancet? Why shouldn't he take the rough with the smooth?"

"But what's it got to do with you?"

"I'll tell you what, brothers, cupping is nothing. I've tried it. But what really is bad is having your ear pulled," one of the patients broke in.

Everybody laughed.

"Did somebody pull yours?"

"Of course they did, what d'you think?"

"That's why they stick out so."

Shapkin, as the prisoner was called, had long protruding ears. Once a vagrant, he was a quiet, sensible man, still young, and had a sense of straight-faced humour that made some of his stories especially comical.

"Why should I think about whether you've had your ears pulled or not? And why should it occur to me anyway, you fat-head?" Ustyantsev began indignantly again, though Shapkin had not addressed himself to him alone, but to all of us. Shapkin, however, did not even look at him.

"And who pulled them for you?" asked somebody.

"Why, a police chief of course. That was when I was on the road. Two of us got to K., that is me and another

tramp called Yefim, just Yefim with no other name. On our way we had done pretty well at a peasant's house in Tolmina. It's a little village, is Tolmina. Well, as we went on we looked around to see if we couldn't get something out of this place and clear out, because a man is free in the field, but not so in town. The first thing we did was go to a pub. A chap came up to us, quite down at the heels and out at the elbows. When we had talked a bit, he said: 'You've got your document,\* haven't you?' 'No,' said we, 'we haven't.' 'Quite so,' he says, 'I haven't got one either. I have two friends who serve at General Cuckoo's\*\* and the three of us have been on a spree and grew no richer by it. So would you treat us to half a dram?' 'With the greatest of pleasure,' we said. And so we had a drink together. He told us about a job in our line. There was a house at the edge of the town where some merchant lived; he had a lot of fine things. And so we decided to pay him a visit. But the five of us got caught that very night in the merchant's house. We were taken to the police-station and then to the chief himself. 'I'll do the questioning,' he said. He was smoking a big pipe and they brought some tea for him. A big strong man, he was, with whiskers. There were three others who were brought in besides, tramps too. A tramp is a funny fellow, brothers, he never remembers anything, not if he can help it. He doesn't know a thing. The chief tackles me first. 'Who are you?' he boomed at me like an empty barrel. I answered as usual of course: 'Can't remember anything, your Honour, I have forgotten everything.' 'Then wait,' says he. 'I'll have a talk with you afterwards. I think I know that mug of yours.' And he kept on goggling at me all the time, but I was sure I'd never laid eyes on him before. 'And who are you?' he

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\* That is, the passport.—*Author's note.*

\*\* That is, they live in the woods. He means that they are vagrants too.—*Author's note.*

asked the next man. 'Take-to-my-heels, your Honour.' 'Is that your name?' 'Yes, your Honour, that's it.' 'All right, and you?' he said to the next man. 'I'm-with-him, your Honour.' 'I mean what's your name?' 'But that's my name.' 'Who called you that, you rascal?' 'Some good people, your Honour. There are some good people in the world.' 'And who were these good people?' 'I don't remember, your Honour, forgive me kindly.' 'You mean that you don't remember anyone?' 'No, not a one of them, your Honour.' 'Perhaps you've forgotten your father and mother too? Had you a father and mother?' 'I suppose I had, your Honour. I'm not sure though.' 'Where have you lived until now?' 'In the woods, your Honour.' 'All the time?' 'Yes.' 'What about winter?' 'I haven't seen winter, your Honour.' 'Well, and what is your name?' he asked the next. 'Axe, your Honour.' 'And yours?' 'Sharpen-it-and-look-sharp, your Honour.' 'And yours?' 'File-it-down-never-fear, your Honour.' 'And so none of you remember anything?' 'No, not a thing, your Honour.' The chief just stood there laughing and we kept grinning too. Sure, he might have punched our faces for us. He was a huge man, like all the others of his kind. 'Put them in the jug,' he says, 'I'll deal with them later, but you stay here!' meaning me. 'Sit down.' There was a table and pen and paper. 'What's he up to?' thought I. 'Sit down on that chair, pick up the pen and write.' He grabbed me by the ear. I stared at him. 'I can't write, your Honour,' said I. 'Write, I tell you!' 'Have a heart, your Honour,' I said again. 'Write as well as you can!' And he gave my ear such a yank that I saw stars. 'Well I'd rather have three hundred sticks than that,' thought I. 'How could I write?' "

"Was he out of his mind, or what?"

"No, it wasn't that at all. There was a clerk in Tobolsk who had pinched some government money and made off. His ears stuck out like mine. His description had

been sent out everywhere and I fitted it exactly, and so the chief was trying to find out if I could write."

"Now just think of that! Did it hurt?"

"I should say so."

There was general laughter.

"Did you write anything?"

"How could I? I pushed the pen about and then gave up. He knocked me on the head about ten times and let me go—to the jug I mean."

"But you can't write, can you?"

"I used to, but forgot how when they began writing with pens."

It was in talk such as this that we passed our weary hours. My God, how bored I was on those long, stifling days, all exactly alike. If only I had a book of some kind! Yet, I went to hospital often, especially at first. Sometimes because I was ill and sometimes simply to get away from the prison. It was hard for me there, even worse than in hospital—morally worse. Malice, hostility, wrangling, envy, perpetual chicanery of us the gentlemen, spiteful menacing faces. In hospital, at least, we were all more or less on the same footing, more friendly. The saddest time of the day was the evening by candle-light and the first hours after the candles were put out. We went to sleep early. A feeble night-light burned near the door, but our end of the ward was dark. The air was fetid and impossible to breathe. Unable to sleep, a patient would get up and sit on his bed for an hour or two, his night-capped head bent as if in thought. To kill the time somehow, I would watch him for a whole hour, trying to guess what he was thinking of. Or I would dream and recollect the past and vivid pictures would form in my mind's eye. Some little things would come back to me, things that I would hardly remember and feel with such intensity at other times. Or I would muse over the future. How would it all be when I get out of prison?

And where would I go? And when would it happen? Would I ever get home? I would think and think and hope would begin to glimmer within me. Or I would just begin to count: "One, two, three," hoping to make sleep come on. Sometimes I would count right up to three thousand without falling asleep. Then someone would begin to toss and turn; Ustyantsev would cough his diseased cough, groan feebly and add each time: "Oh Lord, I have sinned." His sick whining sounded so strange in that stillness. Some other man, unable to sleep, would begin to talk to his neighbour. He would talk of his past, far away and long ago, about his life on the road or about his children, his wife, and how things used to be; and from the very sound of the whisper I would feel that none of the things that he spoke about would ever come back to him, and that the speaker himself was cut adrift for ever. And he would keep on whispering monotonously like water murmuring far away. I particularly remember a story I heard one especially long winter night. It seemed like a delirious dream at first—as though I lay burning with fever and was imagining it all.

#### IV

#### AKULKA'S HUSBAND

#### *(A Story)*

It was quite late, getting on for twelve. I had dozed off, but then suddenly found myself awake. The dim night-lamp scarcely relieved the darkness. Everybody was asleep. Even Ustyantsev seemed to be sleeping, drawing gurgling breaths of air in the stillness. The heavy tread of the relief guard suddenly resounded far down the corridor. A rifle butt thudded to the floor. The

door opened and the corporal entered cautiously, and counted all the patients. The ward was then locked, the new guards took their posts and all was still again. Only then did I notice two men whispering to each other not far away on my left. It sometimes happened in hospital that men who had lain side by side for months without exchanging a word would suddenly begin to talk under inviting cover of the night and one of them would then lay bare the whole of his past before the other. These two had evidently been talking for a long time. I had missed the beginning and even now could not hear some of the words distinctly. Bit by bit, however, I began to follow the voice. I could not sleep and there was nothing to do but listen. One of them was talking with feverish intensity, propped on his elbow, craning his neck towards his companion. He must have been excited and eager to tell his story. His listener was sitting up morosely indifferent, occasionally mumbling something in mark of sympathy, but rather out of politeness than any real interest, and stuffing his nose with snuff from his snuffbox from time to time. The listener's name was Cherevin and he was a soldier of the penal battalion. He was a man of about fifty, a sullen, pedantic, coldly moralizing and conceited fool. The teller of the story was a young man, not yet thirty, a civil section prisoner who worked in the tailor-shop. I had never paid much attention to this man before, and later too was somehow not interested in him. He was a giddy, empty-headed individual. Sometimes he would be silent and sulky for weeks, speaking to no one, and then he would suddenly get embroiled with someone or other, begin to gossip, get wrought up over trifles, scurry from barrack to barrack, backbiting and losing his temper. Finally someone would give him a thrashing and he would relapse into his former sulks. He was a cowardly, colourless creature whom no one took seriously. He was slight of build and his eyes were

shifty, growing thoughtful at times in a vacant sort of way. When he happened to be telling of something, he would begin with great excitement, waving his arms about, and then break off and wander into something irrelevant, forgetting what he had meant to say. He used to quarrel often and when he did he was sure to reproach his adversary with great feeling and almost in tears. He played the balalaika rather well and liked playing. He even danced on the holidays, if he was made to do so, and did not do it badly either. It was easy to make him do anything. It was not that he was very obedient, but always trying to make friends and be obliging.

For a long time I could not make out anything. He kept wandering from the main drift of his story as usual. He must have noticed that Cherevin was absolutely indifferent and was trying to convince himself that his hearer was all attention. He would have been deeply hurt if he had admitted to himself that it was not so.

"When he went to the market," he went on, "everybody doffed their hats and bowed to him. In short, he was a rich man."

"Did you say he owned a shop?"

"Yes, he owned two. The people in our parts were very poor, beggars you might say. Our women had to carry water over such a long way from the river to water the cabbage. They'd be working themselves to the bone and in the autumn there would not be enough cabbage even for soup. Wrack and ruin! He had a big farm and three hired men. He had some beehives too and sold honey and cattle. In short, a high and mighty man in our parts. He was old, seventy if a day. A great big grey-headed man. He'd go to the market in his greatcoat lined with foxskins and everybody would be greeting him. Showed him due respect, that is. 'Good day, Ankudim Trofimich!' 'Good day to you too,' he would answer. He was not too proud to talk to anyone. 'Are things all right?' 'Well,

things are as all right as soot is white. And how are you, my good sir?' 'I manage, poor sinner that I am.' 'May you live and prosper, Ankudim Trofimich.' He wasn't too proud to speak to anyone, but his every word was as good as a ruble. He was a real scholar, reading the divine books all the time. He would set his old woman before himself and say: 'Now listen, wife, and try to understand.' And he'd begin to explain to her. Well, she wasn't exactly old. She was his second wife, he married her because he had had no children by his first. But the second, this Marya Stepanovna, bore him two sons. They were little at the time. The younger, Vasya, was born when Ankudim was sixty. But Akulka, his eldest daughter, was eighteen by that time."

"Was that your wife?"

"Wait a bit. First Filka Morozov began gabbing. 'Let's share the property,' said Filka to Ankudim, 'and let me have my four hundred rubles. I don't want to keep my share in your trade and slave for you or marry your daughter Akulka either. I'm going to have a time of it now. My parents are dead and so I'll drink up all the money and then enlist as a soldier and I'll be a Field Marshal when I come back, in ten years' time.' Ankudim gave him his money and settled with him for good—Filka's father had been his partner, you see? 'You're a lost man,' the old man just told him. 'Lost man or not, I'd be eating milk with a fork if I had to live on with you, you greybeard. You're ready to scrimp over every kopek and scrape up all sorts of rubbish to put in the porridge. But I've had enough of it. You scrape and scrape and land in the grave. I'm a man of character myself. And anyway, I won't have your Akulka, because I've slept with her already.' 'How dare you!' says Ankudim. 'Are you trying to bring shame on an honest father and an honest daughter? When did you sleep with her, you dirty snake? When, fish-face?' All shaking with rage he was, Filka told me.



'I won't marry her,' says Filka, 'and I'll see that nobody else does. Nikita Grigoryich won't have her either because she's dishonoured. She and I have been carrying on since autumn. She's not worth a hundred lobsters to me now. If you gave me a hundred lobsters this minute, I wouldn't touch her.'

"A roaring time he had of it, raising a row all over town. He had a crowd of good pals and he was on a spree for three months—as long as the money lasted. 'When my money is gone,' he used to say, 'I'll sell the house and then go off as a soldier or take to the road.' He'd keep drunk from morning till night, driving a pair of horses with bells on them. The girls loved him something awful. He played the balalaika very well too."

"So he had carried on with Akulka before?"

"Wait a bit. I had just buried my father and we lived by the gingerbread that my mother made for Ankudim's shop. Not much of a living it was. We had a bit of land too on the other side of the woods, and we used to sow some rye there. But when my father died it went to waste, because I was having a good time too. I used to get money out of my mother with my fist."

"That wasn't right. It was a great sin."

"I was drunk from morning till night, brother. Ours was not a bad house, though old and rotten, but it was so empty that you could chase a hare in it. We were so poor that we had nothing to eat but our thumbs for weeks on end. Mother kept jawing at me, of course, but what good did that do? I was always with Filka Morozov, from morning till night. 'Play your guitar,' he would say, 'play and dance while I lie down and toss you some money for it, because I'm the richest man you know.' The things he did! He would not accept stolen goods though. 'I'm no thief,' he would say. 'Let's go,' he said once, 'and smear Akulka's gate with tar. I don't want her to marry Nikita Grigoryich. I've set my heart on it,' he said. The

old man had long been wanting to marry his daughter off to Nikita Grigoryich. Nikita was an old spectacled widower, also in trade. But he backed out of the deal when he heard the rumours about Akulka. 'That would bring great shame on me,' he said. 'And besides, I don't want to get married, I'm too old.' So we smeared Akulka's gates with tar and her folk gave her a good hiding for that. 'I'll put an end to her, I will!' Marya Stepanovna screamed. And the old man said: 'In the olden days when the good Patriarch lived I'd have chopped her up and burned her at the stake. But now the world has sunk into foulness and darkness.' All down the street the neighbours used to hear Akulka screaming. They kept thrashing her from morning till night. And Filka would go shouting all over the market: 'It's a fine wench Akulka is, just the wench to share a bottle of vodka with. Pretty dresser, pretty drinker, pretty mistress! I've given them something to remember me by.' Just about then I met Akulka. She was carrying a couple of pails. 'Good morning, Akulina Kudimovna, respects to your ladyship. Where do you get your fine clothes, my pretty maid?' She looked at me with those great big eyes of hers, and she as thin as a shadow. Her mother on the porch thought she was flirting with me and shouted at her: 'What are you jawing with him for, have you no shame?' And she thrashed her again on the same day. She used to beat her for a whole hour sometimes. 'I'll whip her to death,' she would say, 'because she's no daughter of mine now.' "

"So she was a hussy?"

"You'd better listen, my friend. Filka and I were still drinking then. Once, when I was lying in bed, my mother came to me and began to scold as usual. 'So you're lying in bed, you waster....' The usual thing. 'Why don't you marry Akulka? They'll be glad to give her even to you and give you three hundred rubles into the bargain.' 'But she's been disgraced before everyone,' says I. 'You're a

fool. The marriage covers everything. Besides, it will give you the upper hand over her if something goes wrong. And their money could help us to pull through. I've talked to Marya Stepanovna and she was very willing to listen.' 'Well,' says I, 'twenty rubles down and I'll marry her.' I was drunk every minute of the time right up to the wedding. Filka Morozov kept threatening me: 'I'll break every bone in your body, Akulka's husband! And I'll sleep with your wife every night if I want to!' 'You're lying, you dog!' Then he insulted me before the whole street, so that I ran home and said: 'I won't marry her unless they put down another fifty!'"

"Did they agree to give her to you?"

"Why wouldn't they? We were no worse than them. It was a fire that ruined my father just before he died. We used to be even richer than they. 'You're a lot of beggars!' Ankudim said to me. 'What about the tar that has been smeared over your gates!' I came back at him. 'Don't go crowing over us before your time. First try to prove that she's dishonoured! Wagging tongues mean nothing. There is the icon and there is the door. Take her or return the money we gave you!' I knew what I'd do to Filka: I sent Dmitry Bykov to tell him that I was going to shame him before the whole town. I was drunk all the time until the wedding and sobered up just before church. When they brought us from the church, Mitrofan Stepanich, her uncle, said: 'It wasn't an honest deal, perhaps, but it will hold.' The old man was drunk too and began to cry—he just sat there with the tears running down his beard. Well, I took a whip with me that I got ready beforehand, meaning to have a bit of fun with Akulka. 'I'll teach her,' thought I, 'to get married by deceit. I'll show the people that I didn't marry her because I was a fool.'"

"You were quite right. You meant to make her feel it from the start."

"You'd better listen and keep your mouth shut. In our parts, as soon as you are wed, they leave you in a room with the bride, while the guests go on drinking. And so they left me and Akulka and she sat there very pale, with not a drop of blood in her face. Frightened she must have been. Her hair was also kind of pale, that is flaxen I mean. She had big eyes and never said anything, as if she was mute. She was a queer one. So I put my whip down by the bed and, what do you think, she turned out to be altogether innocent."

"You don't say?"

"Yes, innocent as could be. Why should she have borne all that torture? Why had Filka Morozov shamed her before the town?"

"Yes, why?"

"I got down on my knees, pressed my hands to my breast and said: 'Forgive me, my dear, for being such a fool. Forgive me for being a brute.' And she sat there on the bed looking at me. Then she put her hands on my shoulders and began laughing with the tears running down her cheeks, crying and laughing both at once. Then I went out to all of them. 'If I meet Filka Morozov,' I said, 'I'll put an end to him.' Now the old folks did not know whom to thank. Her mother almost fell at Akulka's feet, howling. And the old man said: 'If we had only known, what a husband we would have found for you, our beloved daughter!' When I went to church on the first Sunday, I wore an astrakhan hat, a fine cloth kaftan and velveteen trousers. And she wore a new hareskin jacket and a silk kerchief. I mean that I was a good match for her and she for me. You ought to have seen us. Everyone admired us, I tell you. I mean myself and Akulka too. You couldn't set her up above everyone else, but she was no worse than anyone."

"So all was well after all?"

"You just listen. On the second day after the wedding

I got away from the guests though I was drunk. 'Give me that good-for-nothing Filka Morozov,' I shouted. 'Give me that blackguard this minute!' I was shouting it all over the place. I was drunk of course and three men caught me by Vlasov's gate and brought me back home by force. There was a lot of talk in town after that. 'Listen, girls, have you heard that Akulka turned out to be an honest girl after all?' the women would say in the market. But a bit afterwards, Filka said to me in front of people: 'Why don't you sell your wife and drink up the money? That's why our soldier Yashka got married. He never slept with her, but was drunk for three years afterwards.' 'You rotten scum,' I said. 'And you're a fool,' he said. 'They got you drunk when they wedded you. Much you know about that sort of thing when you're drunk.' So I went home and shouted, 'You wedded us when I was drunk.' Mother flew at me for that. 'Listen, mother,' I said. 'Your ears are stopped with gold and so you don't hear what they're saying. Where is Akulka?' And I knocked Akulka about for two hours or so, until I was too tired to stand up myself. She was in bed for three weeks after that."

"Well, of course," Cherevin remarked lazily. "If you don't beat them, they'll— But did you catch her with a lover?"

"No, I didn't," said Shishkov with an effort after a short silence. "But it hurt me, you know. People had been laughing at me, and Filka was the worst of all. 'Your wife's a model for all to coddle.' He invited us all to his house and then let fly something like this: 'His wife,' he says, 'is a kind lady, a real lady, nice and good-mannered. That's what she is now. But have you forgotten, fellow, that you smeared her gates with tar?' I was quite drunk so he grabbed me by the hair and kept pushing me down. 'Dance,' he says, 'dance, Akulka's husband! I'll be holding you by the hair while you dance.' 'You

scum!" I shouted. 'I'm going to come to your house with the whole company,' he said, 'and I'll whip your wife as much as I like.' So believe it or not, I did not dare to go out of the house for a whole month after that. I was afraid he'd come while I was away. And just because of that I began to beat her."

"But what for? You can't tie everyone's tongue. It isn't right to beat a wife all the time. You've got to punish her, teach her a lesson, but then be kind to her. That's what a wife is for."

Shishkov was silent for a time.

"I was hurt," he began. "And so I got into the habit: On some days I would beat her from morning till night because everything that she did seemed wrong to me. And if I didn't beat her I was bored. She used to sit, looking out of the window and just crying. She would be crying all the time and I was sorry for her. But still I beat her. How my mother did nag because of her. 'You scoundrel,' she would say. 'You piece of offal!' 'Let no one dare say anything to me!' I would shout. 'Wasn't I tricked into this marriage?' At first the old man tried to stand up for her and came to see us himself. 'You're not as important as you think you are! I'll have the law on you.' But then he gave it up and Marya Stepanovna changed her tune too. 'I've come to ask you something, Ivan Semyonich,' she begged me with tears one day. 'It's a little thing, but yet a great favour.' And she bowed down to me. 'Forgive her, have a heart! Evil people took her good name, but you know yourself that she was honest when you married her.' She bowed to the ground weeping. But I felt that I was the master now. 'I won't even listen to you. I'll do what I like with all of you. How do I know what I'll do in a rage! As to Filka Morozov, he's my crony and best friend.' "

"You mean you went on a spree with him again?"

"Not me. One couldn't even get near him then and

him drinking like a fish. When he had spent everything he had, he said that he would volunteer to take the place of a townsman's eldest son who was to be taken to the army. And in our parts when a man did such a thing he would be master in the house to the very day that they took him away. He gets the money in full only when he reports for the army. But until then he lives in the house, sometimes as long as half a year and the things he does to the people of the house! It's enough to make one want to take the icons out for shame. He's doing them a good service, and so they have to respect him. If they won't, he may refuse. And so Filka turned the house upside down, sleeping with the daughter, pulling the father's beard after dinner every blessed day and doing anything he liked. He made them prepare the bath for him every day, throw vodka on the hot bunk instead of water to send up steam and had the womenfolk carry him into the bath in their arms. He would come back to the house after a binge, but would stay outside the fence: 'I don't want to use the gate. Pull down the fence!' And so they would have to pull down part of the fence to let him through. But at last the time came. He sobered up and they took him off to report. Crowds of people came down the street to watch: 'They're taking Filka Morozov off to the army.' And he, Filka, stood there bowing to everyone. And just at that moment Akulka was coming from the kitchen garden. 'Stop!' he yelled to the driver and jumped off the cart. He came up to her and bowed to the ground. 'My precious darling,' he said. 'I have loved you for two years and now they're taking me off as a soldier. Forgive me, honest girl that you are, for all that I have done to you.' And he bowed to her again. Akulka stood still at first as if frightened and then bowed to him and said: 'Farewell, young man. I bear no grudge.' I followed her into the house after that. 'Why did you say that to him, you bitch!' says I. 'I said it to him, because I love

him more than anything in the world,' she answers, believe or believe it not."

"You don't say!"

"I said not a word to her all day after that. It was only when it was nearly evening that I said: 'I'm going to kill you for this, Akulka.' I could not fall asleep that night and went out in the passage to get a drink of kvass. It was just beginning to dawn. 'Akulka,' I said to her when I came back. 'Get ready to go out; we're going to our plot of land.' I had been meaning to go there before and mother knew it. 'That's good,' she said. 'We oughtn't to lose any time with the harvesting beginning, and they tell me that our hired hand has been sick in bed with stomach trouble for three days.' I hitched the horse and said nothing. We had to drive fifteen versts through the woods to reach my plot on the other side. When we got some three versts into the woods I stopped the horse. 'Get off, Akulka,' I said. 'Your end has come.' She looked at me frightened like and didn't say anything. 'I've had enough of you,' I said, 'say your prayers.' I twisted her plaits round my hand—she had long thick plaits—bent her head back, took out my knife and slit her throat. Didn't she scream though! And the blood spouted out and I threw my knife away and my arms around her and fell to the ground with her yelling and crying. She was screaming and I was screaming. She was struggling out of my arms and the blood was all over me—it was just pouring all over my face and over my hands, just pouring and pouring. I let go of her. I was so scared. I left the horse and ran and ran homewards through the backways and into the bath-house. We had an old bath-house which we never used. I hid under the bench and stayed there until dark."

"And what about Akulka?"

"Well, she must have got up after I left her, because they found her about one hundred paces from the place."



"So you didn't cut her throat through?"

"No..." Shishkov paused.

"There is a vein," remarked Cherevin, "and if you don't cut through it at the first go, the person will go on struggling no matter how much blood keeps flowing. He won't die."

"But she did die, I tell you. They found her dead that night. They told the authorities and started a search for me; they found me in the bath-house. And so I've been here for more than three years now."

"Hm, no good comes of it if you don't beat them," remarked Cherevin coolly as he reached for his snuff-box. He took long deliberate sniffs. "But come to think of it, my boy, I've got to set you down as a downright fool. I once caught my wife like that with a lover too. So I made her go into the shed and doubled up my halter. 'Whom did you promise to obey?' I said thrashing her. 'Whom did you promise to obey?' And so I kept beating her for an hour and a half until she said: 'I'll wash your feet and drink the water!' Avdotya her name was."

## V

### SUMMER

It was the beginning of April and the Holy Week was drawing near. The summer work gradually began. The sun grew warmer and brighter with every day, and the air smelled of spring and was disturbing even for a man in chains, awakening vague longing and homesickness. Men pine even more bitterly for freedom in the bright sunshine than in the dull days of winter and autumn. That was to be seen in every one of the convicts. They seemed to be gladdened by the good weather, yet more impatient and fretful. I even noticed that the quarrels seemed to flare up more often in the spring. The noise, the shouting

and uproar mounted too. And yet I would intercept a pensive stare of a man at work, a stare fixed on the blue spaces over the Irtysh, where the immense carpeted steppes of Kirghizia fell away for fifteen hundred versts. Or one would hear a deep sigh from him as if he were longing for a breath of that distant free air to ease his crushed spirit. "What's the use!" he would exclaim at last, as though shaking off his dreams as he seized a spade or reached for the bricks to be carried to another spot with abrupt and sullen impatience. The fleeting pang was forgotten in a minute and he would be laughing or cursing with the rest according to his mood. Or he would hurl himself at his work with quite unwarranted zeal as if he were trying to overcome something within him, something that was trying to burst through. They were all strong men, for the most part in their prime. Heavy are the fetters at such a time! I'm not just trying to be poetic, but am convinced of the stark truth of this. In the warmth of spring, when the sun is bright and nature is reawakening in its boundless might, the confinement, the guards and the subjection to another's will become increasingly chaffing. And all over Russia and all over Siberia at this time the vagabonds appear with the first lark: God's people break away from the prisons and save themselves in the forests. After the foul dungeon air and interminable courts, after the fetters and the rods they wander about at their own sweet will wherever they wish and the land looks good and they are as free as the birds. They eat and drink what God sends them and fall asleep tranquilly after dark in the forest or under God's eye in the open field untroubled by cares or prison anguish, with only the stars to bid them good night. It is a hard, hungry and weary life, of course, the life in General Cuckoo's service. Sometimes there is not a crust of bread for days on end, sometimes one must run from all the world and sometimes steal, loot,

and even kill. A settler is like an infant reaching for whatever it sees, they say in Siberia of the ex-convict settler, and this applies even more forcefully to the derelict. It is seldom that a tramp is not a robber and scarcely ever that he is not a thief—but more out of necessity than inclination. Some men are born vagabonds and will run away from the settlement they had been assigned to even after their sentence of hard labour is finished. One might have thought they would feel happy and secure once out of prison, but no, something seems to draw them away, to call them somewhere. The forest life, poor, frightening, but free and full of adventure, has some mysterious attraction for those who have once tasted of it. And quite suddenly a man will be off even if he had seemed a steady modest person who had shown every promise of becoming a good settler and a capable farmer. Sometimes he may even have married and raised a family and lived five years or more in one place. Yet one fine morning he will vanish, leaving his wife, children, and the entire settlement he was assigned to completely perplexed and bewildered. One of these fugitives was pointed out to me in prison. He had committed no particular crime, or at least none that I had heard of, but had merely kept running away whenever he could. He had been to the southernmost ends of Russia, beyond the Danube, in the Kirghiz steppes, in Eastern Siberia, in the Caucasus and everywhere else. Under different circumstances he might have made a good Robinson Crusoe with his passion for travel. It was not he who told me of all this, however, but others. He was a silent man of fifty, saying only what was absolutely necessary, a peasant of slight stature, peaceful, with a singularly calm expression, unruffled indeed to the point of stupidity. In the summer he liked to sit in the sun, humming a tune so softly that it could not be heard even a few paces away. There was something wooden

about his features. He ate very little, chiefly bread, was not remembered to have ever bought a single white loaf or dram of vodka and it was even doubtful whether he had ever had any money or even knew how to count. He regarded everything with complete placidity. He used to feed the prison dog sometimes, something no one else did. The common people think that it is quite superfluous to feed a dog. He was said to have been married, and more than once too, and was even supposed to have children somewhere. I do not know just what he was sent to prison for. Everybody expected him to slip away as soon as he could, but it was either that the time had not yet come or that he was getting on in years. Be it as it may, he went on living quietly, regarding his strange surroundings with perfect equanimity. One could not be sure, of course, although what good would it have done him to escape? It should not be forgotten that taken as a whole forest life is paradise compared with prison. There can be no comparison in fact. It may be a hard lot, but freedom is freedom, and every convict in Russia, wherever he may be, grows restless in the spring with the first kindly rays of the sun. Not everybody means to run away. It may be safely said that what with the difficulties and fear of the consequences, only one man in a hundred will make up his mind to do it, while the other ninety-nine will indulge in daydreams of how they might escape and where they might escape to and relieve their hearts by thinking about it and calculating the chances. Or one might recall how he once actually did run away. I am speaking of those who were already serving their sentences and not those who were awaiting sentence and therefore more frequently ventured to escape. If a convict runs away at all, he does so only at the beginning of his term. When he has served two or three years, he comes to value them as years served off his sentence and little by little he re-

conciles himself to the idea that it is better to finish the term lawfully and be assigned to a free settlement than risk an escape and face other ruin in the event of failure. And failure was more than possible. Only one in ten succeeds in *changing his lot*. Among the convicts serving their sentences it is mostly those who have been condemned to long terms who resolve to escape. Fifteen or twenty years seem an eternity and the convict condemned to such a term always dreams of changing his lot, even if he has already served ten years. And then, the brands, too, hampered a man's escape. *Changing one's lot* has come to be an official term. If caught while attempting to escape, a convict will subsequently tell the court that he wanted to change his lot. This fanciful expression is quite apt. A would-be fugitive is not so much out to regain his freedom, since he knows that it is practically impossible, but to land in another prison, a settlement, or to be tried on a new charge for fresh crimes committed during his wanderings. In short, to get anywhere but escape the old hateful place. If during the course of summer these fugitives do not find some convenient spot to spend the winter, if they do not come across someone who finds it to his advantage to shelter them, or manage to procure somebody else's passport (sometimes by murder)—they mostly come flocking back to the towns and jails of their own accord in the autumn and spend the winter in prison hoping to escape again next year.

The spring affected me as well. I remember gazing hungrily through the chinks in the stockade or pressing my head against the fence and staring obstinately and insatiably at the green grass on the rampart and the sky growing a deeper and deeper blue. Ennui and restlessness mounted within me from day to day and the prison grew ever more hateful. The hatred which I as a gentleman endured constantly during my first years in

prison became unbearable and my life was utterly poisoned with its venom. I often went to hospital, though not ill, solely to get away from the prison and to evade that persistent, unrelieved hatred of the convicts. "It's you, iron beaks, who have pecked us to death," the convicts used to say to us. How I envied the common people who came to the prison. They found friends at once. And that was why the spring, the joyousness in all of nature and the spectre of freedom it evoked, was disturbing and filled me with melancholy.

At the end of Lent, that is in its sixth week, I had to prepare for the Communion. From the very first week the whole prison had been divided by the senior officer into seven groups of thirty, one group for each week of Lent. I liked the week of fasting. We were not sent to work then, but went to church, not very far from the prison, two or three times a day. I had not been to church for a long time. The Lent services, so familiar from my childhood, the prayers, the reverences, all stirred memories of the far-off past in my heart, the memories of my childhood. I remember how pleasant it was to go to the House of God in the early morning over the roads still frozen from the night. Our guards did not follow us into the church. We would crowd together inside, near the door at the back so that we could hear only the deacon's loud voice or from time to time catch a glimpse of the priest's black surplice and bald head. I remembered how as a child I sometimes used to look at the common people crowded together near the door or readily making way for a pair of epaulettes, a stout landowner or an overdressed and extremely pious lady who passed to the front to vie with others for the best place. At that time I thought that those who stood near the door did not even pray in the same way that we did, but meekly and fervently bowed from the waist in the full consciousness of their humbleness.

Now I had to stand in that place myself and was even worse off than they had been. We were fettered and accursed. Everyone shrank away from us or tossed us alms, but I remember that I found some strange subtle pleasure in it. "If it is so, so be it!" The convicts prayed fervently and each of them brought forth his pitiful kopek to buy a candle or put it on the plate. "I'm a man too, after all," he thought as he did this. "Everybody is equal in the sight of God." We partook of our sacrament at the early mass and when the priest, chalice in hand, chanted, "Accept me, O Lord, even as the thief," all of us sank to our knees, our fetters clinking, and feeling that the words were addressed particularly to ourselves.

Then came Easter. The authorities presented each of us with a dyed egg and a slice of sweet bread. The townsfolk again heaped presents on the prison and again the visit of the priest and the cross and another from the governor and again our cabbage soup was cooked with meat and many got drunk and staggered about the prison—exactly as it had been at Christmas, with the difference that it was now possible to walk about in the courtyard and bask in the sun. There seemed to be more light and space than in the winter, but also more sadness. The endless summer days dragged heavily on in holiday time. On ordinary days our work seemed to shorten the day somewhat.

The summer work turned out to be much heavier than in the winter. It was mostly work of building. The prisoners dug foundations and laid bricks. Others were employed as locksmiths, carpenters and painters on the repair of government buildings. Still others were sent to the kilns to make bricks, which was regarded as the heaviest work of all. The kilns lay three or four versts from the fortress, and every day in the summer a large party of convicts, about fifty strong, would set off at

about six o'clock in the morning to make bricks. Only those who had no trade whatever were chosen for such work. They took bread with them, because it was too far to return for dinner—this would have meant an extra walk of eight versts—and received their regular rations only when they came back to the prison in the evening. Their task was so great that they could hardly finish with it even in that long workday. A prisoner had first to dig up and carry the clay, bring water, then trample the clay into pug and then mold it into bricks, two hundred and even two hundred and fifty for each man. I only went to the kilns twice. The makers of bricks did not return until evening, completely exhausted, and all summer long they would complain to everyone that it was they who had the hardest work to do. This seemed to give them some consolation. There were some, however, who went to the kilns with a certain eagerness. The place was outside the town to begin with, a free and open space on the bank of the Irtish, and there was something else to look at but the drab prison walls. They could smoke peacefully or even lie down for half an hour. As for me, I was still sent as before to the gypsum kilns or was employed as a brick-carrier on the building sites. At one time, I had to carry bricks from the bank of the Irtish across the rampart to a barrack that was being erected—a distance of some 160 yards. The work went on for about two months and I even came to like it though the rope with which I carried the bricks cut cruelly into my shoulders. What pleased me was that the work made me stronger. At first I could not carry more than eight bricks at a time, each weighing twelve pounds, but afterwards I carried twelve and even fifteen. This gave me great satisfaction. Physical strength is no less necessary than moral strength to endure the hardships of that accursed life.

I hoped to have some sort of life after prison too.



I liked carrying bricks, however, not only because the work strengthened my body, but also because it took me to the banks of the Irtysh. I have mentioned this so often because it was the only place from which God's earth could be seen, the bright pure spaces and the free lonely steppes whose wild emptiness affected me so strangely. The bank was the only place where I could turn my back on the fortress. All other labour sites were either in or near the prison. I hated that fortress from the first, and some of the buildings I hated particularly. Our major's house seemed especially loathsome; I could hardly repress my revulsion every time I passed it. But on the river bank I could forget myself. I would look out over those lonely spaces, the way a captive peers from the window of his tower. Everything out there was so dear and lovely: the bright sun in the deep, deep sky, or a Kirghiz's distant song from the farther bank. I would keep looking until I could discern the sooty, beggarly tent of some Baigush, the whisp of smoke beside the tent and a Kirghizian woman busy with her two sheep. They were so poor and wild, but free. Then I would spot a bird in the transparent blue sky and follow it with my eyes as long as I could. Now it would be skimming over the water, now disappearing in the blue to reappear as a barely visible speck. Even a poor sickly flower in a cleft could arrest my attention in a painful way. The anguish of the first year in prison made me irritable and bitter and I could not notice many of the things around me. I shut my eyes and refused to look. I could not see the good people among the malicious and hostile, the people capable of thinking and feeling in spite of the repulsive crust that covered them on the surface. I overlooked the kind and affectionate word among the jeers, the word which was all the dearer because spoken in sincerity and often springing from a heart that had borne and suffered more than mine. But

I have drifted from my story. I was always glad if I could get tired enough towards the end of the day; perhaps I would be able to sleep? Trying to sleep in the summer was worse than in winter. It is true that the evenings were sometimes pleasant. The sun which had baked the courtyard all day relented at last; the air grew cool, and finally there came a rather cold night of the steppes. Waiting for lock-up time, the prisoners would walk about the yard in groups, though most of them crowded together in the mess barrack where some urgent question was always being discussed. Sometimes it was a rumour that was being threshed out, often absurd, yet awakening extraordinary interest among these men isolated from the world. Suddenly word would reach us that the major was to go away. The convicts were as credulous as children. Though they knew that the news was nonsensical and that the prisoner Kvasov who had brought it was well known as an idle chatterer, an odd character whom they had long decided not to believe because he had never spoken a true word—they seized upon it, discussing it from all angles, hoping against hope and ending by being angry and ashamed of themselves for having been taken in again.

"Who is going to turn him out?" somebody would say. "His neck is tough enough to stand anything."

"But there are people higher than he," objected another, a rather clever and experienced man, but an impetuous tongue-lasher.

"Birds of a feather never peck at each other," remarked a third thoughtfully. He was a grey-headed man sitting alone in a corner over his cabbage soup.

"And those who are higher than he will be sure to come here and ask for your opinion about it," casually remarked another strumming a balalaika.

"And why not?" retorted the tongue-lasher. "They ought to ask us about it. Everybody should speak up if

they begin to ask. We're loud-mouthed enough, but when it comes to business we slink away."

"What do you expect us to do?" said the balalaika-player. "A prison's a prison."

"There was some flour left the other day," the tongue-lasher went on in a passion. "They scraped up the last sweepings and sent it off to be sold, but the mess man told the major about it and he took it away. 'Economy,' he calls it. Was that right?"

"But to whom will you complain?"

"To the inspector himself!"

"What do you mean, the inspector?"

"That's right, friends, the inspector is coming," said a lively young fellow who could read and write—he had once been a clerk and had actually read *The Duchesse de la Valliere* or something of the sort. Though something of a wag, he was held in respect for his worldly wisdom. Disregarding the general curiosity he had aroused, he went to the kitchen—"maid" and asked for a bit of liver. Our cooks often traded in such things. They would buy a piece of liver, fry it and sell it to the convicts bit by bit.

"A kopek or half a kopek's worth?"

"A kopek's worth. I want them to envy me," answered the young man. "It's a general that's coming, friends, a general from St. Petersburg. He's going to inspect the whole of Siberia. It's true; they've been talking about it at the commandant's."

The news was received with enthusiasm. The talk went on for half an hour. Who was he exactly? What sort of a general? What was his rank and was he higher than the one we had here? The convicts were very fond of talking about chiefs, ranks, and who was senior to whom and who could get whom under. They could almost come to blows over such arguments. One might have asked what difference it made to them after all?

But it so happened that the degree of a man's worldly wisdom, sagacity and a man's importance before he came to prison were measured by his knowledge of generals and other high ranks. The higher authorities were considered the most refined and important subject of conversation.

"So the major is really going to get the sack," remarked Kvasov, a little red-faced man, very hot-tempered and slow-witted. It was he who first brought the news about the major's departure.

"He'll bribe himself out of it," objected the grey-haired convict abruptly; he had finished his soup by then.

"Yes he will," agreed another. "I'm sure he's put by a good bit of money. They say he was a battalion commander before he came here. It was only the other day that he proposed to the priest's daughter."

"But they turned him down. He's too poor. What sort of a husband would he make? All that he has is what he sits on. He lost all his money playing cards on Easter. Fedka told me."

"Yes, he runs through his money as fast as he gets it."

"Ah, my friend, I've been married too," remarked Skuratov irrelevantly. "It's a bad thing for a poor man to get married. 'Even the night is shorter for the groom that is poor.'"

"Yes, it's just you we've been wanting to talk about!" the ex-clerk snubbed him. "And as for you, Kvasov, let me tell you that you're a fool. Do you really think our major could give enough to a general like him? Or that a general like him would come all the way from St. Petersburg to inspect some major? You're not very bright, if you ask me."

"Why, d'you mean if he's a general he won't take it? No fear!" said one of the crowd sceptically.

"Of course he won't, but if he does it must be plenty."

"Sure it must be plenty to suit his rank."

"A general will never refuse," declared Kvasov roundly.

"Have you ever tried to bribe one?" said Baklushin who had just come in. "I'm sure you've never laid eyes on one."

"I have."

"That's a lie!"

"You're a liar yourself."

"Listen, friends, if he has really seen one, then let him say before all of us just what general he was. Speak up! I know all the generals."

"I saw General Zibert," answered Kvasov dubiously.

"Zibert? There never was such a general. Perhaps he saw you from behind and you were so scared that you thought he was a general when he was only a lieutenant-colonel."

"No, you listen to me," cried Skuratov. "I'm a married man after all! There was a General Zibert in Moscow. His name was German, but he was a Russian. He used to come to confessional at a Russian priest's once a year at Assumption time. He drank water like a duck. He put down forty glasses of water from the Moskva River every blessed day. He did it to get rid of some illness, they said. His valet told me."

"I suppose he had tadpoles in his belly with all that water?" remarked the prisoner with the balalaika.

"Shut up, we are talking seriously. Just who is that inspector, friends?" anxiously inquired Martynov, a fidgety old man who once served in the Hussars.

"Just listen to their lies," remarked one of the sceptics. "Where do they get these stories from? Such tripe too!"

"No, it's not tripe," asserted Kulikov dogmatically, who had so far kept a dignified silence. He was about

fifty, regular-featured and magnificently arrogant. He commanded a certain influence and was proud of it. By profession he was a veterinary, in a sense, and made money in town as a horse doctor. Within the prison walls, he traded in vodka. A man of common sense, he had seen a good deal in his time. He spoke slowly, enunciating each word as if it were worth a ruble.

"It's true enough, friends," he continued weightily. "I heard about it last week. It's a big general who is coming and he's going to inspect the whole of Siberia. He'll get his presents of course, but not from Eight-Eyes. Our major won't even dare go near him. There are generals and generals, friends. There are all sorts. But I'll tell you this: our major will stay where he is whatever happens—that's certain. We have no say, and the chiefs are not going to tell tales on each other. The inspector will just have a look at the prison and then go away and report that everything is fine."

"But our major is scared. He's been drunk all day."

"And in the evening he's going to have another batch of vodka brought up, Fedka told us."

"You can't wash a black dog white. This is not the first time he is drunk."

"Is it possible that even the general will do nothing?" the convicts said excitedly. "We've had enough of their tomfoolery!"

The news of the inspector's visit quickly spread. The men roamed about the courtyard talking impatiently. Others kept deliberately silent and cool, trying to increase their own importance in that manner. Others again were genuinely indifferent. Some prisoners lounged about the barrack steps with balalaikas; some went on chattering, others struck up songs, but on the whole everybody was greatly excited.

Soon after nine we were all counted, herded into the barracks and locked in till the morning. The nights were

short, because we were awakened at five o'clock and it was at least eleven o'clock before everybody was asleep: there was always a great to-do and much talking and sometimes *maydans*, just as in the winter. The nights were intolerably hot and stuffy. Though the window-frames were raised and a cool draft flowed in from time to time, the convicts tossed about all night as though in fever. Flees swarmed everywhere. They thrived in the winter too, but when spring came their number was such that I would never have believed it possible if I had not seen it. And the nearer the summer the more vicious they grew. It is true that one can get used to them as I have found for myself. Still, it was not an easy thing to bear. They used to torment us so that all our nights were more like delirium and fever than sleep. When the flees relented in the lull just before morning and I sank at last into sound sleep in the fresh morning air, the sudden rattle of the drums would come from the direction of the prison gates. Huddled in my sheepskin, I lay cursing at the rhythmic drubbing as if I were counting the strokes. Through my half sleep crept the unbearable thought that it would be the same again tomorrow and the day after tomorrow and every day for years until freedom came, but when would it come? Where was that freedom? Meanwhile, one had to get up. The daily round began with the jostling, dressing, and hurrying to work. It is true that one might snatch an hour's sleep in the afternoon.

The talk about the inspector turned out to be true. The rumours grew more plausible every day, and finally everyone knew for certain that an important general from St. Petersburg was to inspect all Siberia and that he had, in fact, already arrived and was now in Tobolsk. New rumours reached the prison every day, among them reports from the town: everyone seemed frightened and flustered, preparing to put their best foot forward. It

was said that balls, parties, and receptions were afoot in the highest official circles. Prisoners were sent in large groups to level the roads, remove hillocks, repaint the fences and posts, to replaster, whitewash—in short they meant to set everything to rights and make a good showing. The prisoners very well understood what it was all about and discussed things with increasing heat. Their imagination ran riot. They even intended to put forward their *grievances*, should the general ask them if they were satisfied. But meanwhile, they argued and wrangled without end. The major too was plainly agitated. He came to the prison more often than usual, shouted at people and flew at them, sent them to the guardroom and did his best to see that all was spick and span. About this time, as luck would have it, an incident took place in the prison which, however, instead of upsetting the major gave him real satisfaction. In a scuffle one prisoner had thrust an awl into the ribs of another, just beneath the heart.

The culprit's name was Lomov and the victim's Gavrilka, an inveterate vagabond. I cannot remember whether he had a surname: he was always called Gavrilka.

Lomov had sprung from a well-to-do peasant family of K. district in the gubernia of T. His family—the old man, his three sons and their uncle, his brother—all lived together. It was said all over the gubernia that they had as much as three hundred thousand rubles in paper money. They tilled the land, tanned hides, and traded, but their chief source of income was money-lending, sheltering vagabonds, receiving stolen goods and other similar crafts. Half of the peasants in the district were in debt to them and indeed found themselves in bondage. They were reputed to be shrewd and sagacious men, but at last succumbed to their vanity, especially when a very important personage of their parts began to put



up at their house when travelling through their district. He grew well acquainted with the old man and admired his shrewdness and resourcefulness. The family decided then that nothing could stop them now and throwing all caution to the winds, plunged into fresh enterprises. Everybody murmured against them, secretly wishing that the earth would open up and swallow them. Still, the family went on growing ever more arrogant. Police captains meant nothing to them now. At last, however, they slipped and were lost. And not through their evil ways, but through a petty false accusation. They had a large farm, or a *zaimka* as it is called in Siberia, some ten versts from the village. Six Kirghizes lived and worked there for them because they were hopelessly indebted to the family. But one autumn night all six of the Kirghizes were murdered and an investigation set in. It lasted for a long time, bringing many misdeeds of the family to light. To begin with, the Lomovs were charged with having killed their labourers. All the prison knew their story and they too told the same. They had come to be suspected because they had owed their labourers a great deal of money and since they were miserly and greedy, despite their great wealth, it was believed that they had killed the Kirghizes. The investigation and trial ruined them completely. The old man died and his sons were shipped to various places. One of them found himself in our prison together with his uncle. Both had been sentenced to twelve years, and yet they were quite innocent of the murder of the Kirghizes. Sometime later, Gavrilka, a notorious tramp and a very cheerful rogue, came to our prison as well, and it turned out that it had been he who had committed the crime. I did not hear whether he had talked about it himself, but the entire prison was convinced that the murders were his work. He had been acquainted with the Lomovs when on the road and came to the prison with a short sentence as

a runaway soldier and tramp. He and three other tramps had murdered the Kirghizes in order to plunder the farm.

For some reason, no one seemed to like the Lomovs. The younger of the two was an intelligent young man easy to get on with, but the uncle who stabbed Gavrilka was a stupid and quarrelsome peasant who wrangled with everybody and was often thrashed. Everybody liked Gavrilka for his cheerful tolerant character. Though the Lomovs knew that they had landed in prison for his crime, they did not quarrel with him, but kept aloof and he, for his part, paid little attention to them. The quarrel that flared up between the elder Lomov and Gavrilka was quite sudden, the cause being a most repulsive wench. Gavrilka began to brag about her favours and one afternoon the jealous peasant stabbed him with the awl.

Though the Lomovs had been ruined by the trial, they still passed for rich men in prison. They obviously had some money, kept a samovar and drank tea, and our major, for that reason, conceived a strong dislike for them. He was always finding fault with them, trying to lay them by the heels through every means. The Lomovs thought the major's desire to get a bribe from them explained it. But they refused to bribe him. If Lomov had driven the awl home, he would undoubtedly have killed Gavrilka. Actually, the wound was little more than a scratch. The matter was reported to the major who came running to the prison out of breath and obviously pleased. He spoke to Gavrilka with the kindness of a father.

"Well, my friend, can you walk as far as the hospital? Or, perhaps, we had better harness a horse for you? Get the horse straightaway!" he shouted to the sergeant.

"But I have no pain, your Honour! He just pricked me."

"You can't be sure, my dear fellow. It may tell afterwards. It's a dangerous spot he's struck at. He got you under the heart, the cut-throat. And you," he yelled turning to Lomov. "I'll show you something now. To the guardroom!"

And show him he did. Lomov was tried and though the wound proved trifling his intention had been evident. His term of sentence was lengthened and he was given a thousand sticks besides. The major was gratified.

The inspector arrived at last.

He came to the prison on the day after his arrival in town. It was Sunday. Everything had been washed and scrubbed and polished several days before. The convicts were newly shaven; their clothes were white and clean. In the summer everybody wore coarse white linen jackets and trousers, with a black circle about three inches in diameter sewn into the back of the jacket. A full hour was spent in instructing the prisoners how to answer if the inspector should ask them anything; they were put through rehearsals again and again. The major ran about like a madman. Everyone had been ranged at attention rigidly a whole hour ahead of time. The general arrived at one o'clock. He was a very important general, so important indeed that every official heart quaked throughout Western Siberia. He entered grandly, followed by a suite of local chiefs, some of them generals and colonels. There was one civilian too, a tall, handsome gentleman in a frock-coat and patent-leather shoes. He, too, had come from St. Petersburg and bore himself in a free and independent manner. The general addressed him frequently and with extreme courtesy. The convicts were highly intrigued: "A civilian held in such esteem by a general like him!" Later, the convicts learned his surname and just who he was, but before that there was no end of surmises. Our major, in his tight orange-collared uniform, his eyes

bloodshot and face splotched, must have made a disagreeable impression. He had left his glasses off out of respect for the distinguished visitor and stood at some distance as stiff as a ramrod, his whole being quivering in anticipation of the moment when His Excellency would express some desire and he could fly to fulfil the request. His Excellency, however, expressed no desires. He made the rounds of the barracks silently, inspected the mess barrack and tasted the cabbage soup, if my memory does not fail me, I was pointed out to him too: a former nobleman and so on. "Ah," exclaimed the general, "what is his conduct now?"

"So far it has been satisfactory, Your Excellency," was the reply. The general nodded and in some two minutes left the prison. The convicts had been dazzled, of course, but were nonetheless dissatisfied. Any mention of grievances against the major had been quite out of the question, and the major had had little misgivings on that score all along.

## VI

### PRISON PETS

The purchase of a bay horse soon afterwards occupied and entertained the prisoners far more than the exalted visitor. We were supposed to have a horse about to bring up water, remove refuse, and so on. The animal was to be placed in the care of one of the convicts who drove it under guard, of course. There was plenty of work for our horse from morning till night. Our old horse had been with us for a long time. It was a good animal, but worn out. One morning, just before St. Peter's day, it fell as it was hauling the evening's water barrel and died within a few minutes. Everybody was sorry and gathered round the carcass, talking and arguing. Our

ex-cavalrymen, gypsies, horse doctors, and so on displayed a great deal of specialized knowledge and even argued hotly with one another, but could not resurrect the poor animal. It lay there dead with a swollen belly which everybody felt duty-bound to poke with his finger in a professional sort of way. This act of God was duly reported to the major who ordered a new horse to be bought at once. Horses for sale were brought in after mass on St. Peter's day when we were all gathered in the yard. The purchase was naturally entrusted to the convicts. There were some real experts among us and it would indeed have been difficult to hoodwink some two hundred and fifty men who had formerly occupied themselves solely with such matters. Kirghiz herdsmen, various horse dealers, gypsies, and townsmen brought their horses for inspection. The prisoners awaited the arrival of each with impatience. They were as excited as children. What flattered them particularly was that they too seemed to be free men choosing a horse for *themselves* and paying for it with *their own* money. It was only the fourth horse that found favour after three had been rejected. The dealers looked about with some wonder and timidity and glanced at the guards as if seeking support. They were impressed by our gang of two hundred and fifty shaven, branded, and fettered men who were perfectly at home in their prison den whose threshold no one ever crossed. The convicts exhausted their cunning in testing each horse as it was brought up. There was nothing that they did not examine with such business-like earnestness and fussy concern that it seemed the welfare of the prison depended on their choice. Our Circassians even sprang on to the backs of the horses, their eyes ablaze as they chattered in their native tongue, nodding their heads and baring their teeth in dusky, hook-nosed faces. Now and then one of the Russians would stare at them, trying to guess their mean-

ing, to divine whether they had decided that the horse was suitable or not. Their rapt attention might have seemed very odd. Why should a prisoner, usually humble and subdued, and afraid to speak in the presence even of his own friends—why should he be so concerned over such a purchase? He was not buying the horse for himself. What did it matter to him which horse was bought? Besides the Circassians, it was our former horse dealers and gypsies who were most prominent, the others willingly giving them precedence. Something in the nature of a duel took place between two of these men—the prisoner Kulikov, a former horse thief and dealer, and a cunning little Siberian peasant, a self-taught horse doctor who had arrived recently, but had already ousted Kulikov from his practice in town. The fact was that our self-taught prison horse doctors were greatly in demand in the town and not only among the townsfolk and merchants, but even the highest officials, despite the fact that there were several real veterinaries in town. Kulikov had had a large practice until the arrival of Yolkin, the self-taught Siberian peasant. He had indeed been earning a good deal of money, though he was a real gypsy quack and knew much less than he pretended. His money gave him the position of an aristocrat among us. His worldly wisdom, intelligence, and determination had been long respected among the convicts who listened to him attentively and often did as he told. He spoke as little as he could help, but with great dignity. There was something definitely foppish about him, though he had much genuine energy too. Well advanced in years, he was still handsome and intelligent. He treated us, the former noblemen, with politeness and even refinement, without loss of dignity though. I am sure that if one could have put him into decent clothes and introduced him as a count at some club in St. Petersburg, he would not have lost his head,

but would have taken a hand at whist, spoken little but weightily, and perhaps nobody would have guessed that he was not a count, but a tramp. I mean what I say: he was remarkably intelligent, resourceful and quick-witted. In addition, he had picked up very good, even foppish manners. He must have had a fairly checkered career, but little was known of his past. He belonged to the special section. But now his reputation as a veterinary was injured by Yolkin who, though a simple peasant, was an amazingly shrewd man. He was about fifty and an Old Faith believer. In some two months he had ousted Kulikov completely.

With great ease, he cured horses which Kulikov had given up long before, such animals in fact which had been despaired of even by the town veterinaries. He had been sent to prison with several others for counterfeiting. What indeed had possessed him, an elderly man, to get involved in such a matter? He would often make fun of himself over this saying that it took them three gold coins to produce one that was false. Kulikov had been hurt somewhat by his rival's professional successes. His fame had begun to pale even among the convicts. Since he kept a mistress in the suburbs, sported a velvet tunic, a silver ring, earring and his own fancy high boots, he was forced to turn tapster for want of another source of income. Everybody, therefore, expected that the purchase of the new bay would end in an open fight between the two men. Feelings ran high; each of the two had his own supporters and the leaders of each party were working themselves up and exchanging curses. Yolkin himself stood with his face screwed up into the most sarcastic of smiles. Nothing untoward happened however. Kulikov had no thought of being abusive, but instead carried off a masterly stroke. He began by listening to his opponent respectfully, but catching him out in an error modestly

but firmly remarked that he was mistaken and before Yolkin could collect his wits, explained why he was mistaken, in great detail. And though Yolkin's party retained the upper hand, Kulikov's party too were satisfied to see their adversary taken down a peg or two.

"Well, friends, it's no easy thing to knock him down. He can stand up for himself very well," Kulikov's supporters remarked.

"Yolkin knows more," said the others, though without animosity. Both parties had suddenly adopted a conciliatory tone.

"It is not that he knows more, but it is just that he has a lighter hand. When it comes to horses, Kulikov is no simpleton either."

"I should say not."

"That's what I say, not a simpleton!"

At last, the horse was chosen and bought—a fine young bay, strong and handsome, with an expression extraordinarily gentle and cheerful. As for its other points, they were beyond reproach. Thirty rubles was the initial price when the bargaining began. The prisoners offered twenty-five, haggling at great length and with such zest that finally even they were amused at themselves.

"Are you paying for it out of your own pocket?" some remarked. "What are you haggling for?"

"You're not trying to help the state save money, are you?" shouted others.

"Still, it's money after all, friends. Doesn't it belong to the community like?"

"Community like! Well, there's no need to sow such fools as us; we spring up of ourselves."

The bargain was struck at twenty-eight rubles. The matter was reported to the major who at once authorized the purchase. Bread and salt, needless to say, were immediately brought to the spot to welcome the dear



guest who was led to the stall with due ceremony. There was hardly a single prisoner who did not stroke its neck or nose. The bay was harnessed to the water-cart on the same day and everybody stood by to see how the new horse would take to the burden. Our water-carrier, Roman, sat on the cart with utmost complacency. He was a one-time peasant, some fifty years old, and as taciturn and staid as a true Russian coachman. It would seem that constant association with horses gives a man a peculiar stolidity and even importance. Roman was a peaceful man, gentle with all, though rarely inclined to enter into conversation. He was wont to take his snuff from a horn and had been in charge of the prison bays as far back as anyone could remember. The new horse was the third, and a bay like its predecessors, for all were convinced that bay was the right colour for the prison, that it suited us somehow. Roman, too, held that opinion. A piebald, for instance, would never have been chosen by the prisoners. The post of water-carrier somehow belonged to Roman by rote and none of us would have ever thought of disputing it. When the last bay died, it never entered anyone's head, not even the major's, to blame Roman in any way. The news was received as an act of God, and Roman's reputation remained irreproachable. The bay soon came to be the general pet. Grim though they were, the prisoners often came to stroke him. On his return from the river, Roman would be busy locking the gates opened for him by one of the sergeants, while the bay stood waiting inside the yard, rolling his eyes towards his master. "Go on by yourself," Roman would shout, and the bay would obediently draw the barrel to the kitchen and wait for the cooks and latrine orderlies to come with their pails and fetch the water. "Smart little bay," they would call to him. "He's done it all by himself. He does what he is told."

"A poor dumb beast and yet he understands."

"Good for the bay!"

The horse would shake his head and snort as though he really did understand and was pleased with the praise. Somebody would bring him a bit of bread and salt and the animal would eat it and toss his head again, as though to say: "I know you, I know you. I'm a nice horse and you a nice man."

I too liked to treat him to bits of bread! It was pleasant to see his handsome face and feel his warm lips on my palm gathering up my offering.

In general, our convicts were capable of loving animals and if they had been permitted would have raised large numbers of fowl and livestock. I wondered if there was anything else that could have softened and refined their hardened natures better? Such a thing was not allowed, however. Neither the regulations nor our cramped conditions permitted this.

A few animals were brought into the prison by chance during my term. Besides the bay, we had dogs, geese and a goat called Vaska. For some time too we had an eagle.

Our regular prison dog was Sharik, as I have said, a good-natured animal with whom I was always the best of friends. But since dogs are regarded by common people as unclean animals deserving no attention, hardly anyone took any notice of Sharik at all. Still, he existed somehow, slept in the yard, fed on scraps from the kitchen, aroused no compassion in anyone, and regarded everyone as his master. As soon as the cry "corporals!" resounded from the guardroom, announcing the return of the prisoners from work, he flew to the gate, welcoming every new-comer, wagging his tail, hopeful for a pat, and looking invitingly into the face of every man who came in. For many years all his efforts failed to bring him a patron other than myself. In return he

loved me best of all. I cannot remember just how another dog, Belka, turned up in the prison later on. The third one, Kultyapka, was brought by myself. I carried him back with me from work one day when he was a puppy. Belka was a strange creature. She had been run over by a cart so that there was a sag in her back. When she ran, it seemed from a distance that two animals were running. Besides, she was quite mangy and with festering eyes; her tail almost denuded of hair was always curled between her legs. Thus mistreated by fate, she seemed to have made up her mind to submit. She never barked or growled at anyone, lived on scraps, spending most of her time behind the barracks. When any convict came near she would roll over on her back in token of submission, even when he was some paces away. "Do what you like with me," she seemed to say. "I don't mind anything any more." Every prisoner felt that he was duty-bound to kick her and growl: "Look at that lousy curl!" But the poor animal dared not even whine. If the pain was too great, she would utter a piteous yelp. She also squirmed before Sharik or any other dog. She would just lie submissively when some big lop-eared mongrel dashed at her, barking. But then dogs like others of their kind to be submissive. The big mongrel would be appeased at once and would stand looking at her in a thoughtful way and slowly sniff her prostrated body all over. "Well, what now?" Belka probably thought. "What if this ruffian bites me?" But after sniffing her over carefully, the big dog would go away, having found nothing remarkable. Belka then would jump up at once and limp after a long string of dogs escorting some lady mongrel or other. And though she knew for certain that she would never be allowed to be on a friendly footing with this celebrated bitch, she would hobble along if only at a distance—that was a little comfort to her in her misery. She had plainly

ceased to worry about dignity. Having lost all chances of a career, she lived only for food and knew it very well. I tried to stroke her once and this was so new and unexpected to her that she collapsed on her belly, trembling all over and whining. I petted her often because I was sorry for her, and she could never see me without whining. She would often catch sight of me from a distance and emit a plaintive whine. One day, she was at last torn to bits on the rampart by other dogs.

Kultyapka was quite a different sort of a dog. Just why I carried him to the prison when he was still a puppy I do not know. I enjoyed feeding and rearing the animal. Sharik at once took the puppy under his wing and the two slept together. When the puppy grew bigger, Sharik permitted him to bite his ears and tug at his hair and played with him like all dogs do with their puppies. Strangely enough, Kultyapka grew hardly at all in height, but only in length and breadth. He had shaggy mousy hair and one of his ears hung down while the other stood up. He was of a bouncing and excitable disposition, like all puppies squealing, yelping and clambering upwards to lick at their master's face, making the greatest possible show of their feelings. "Let everyone see how I love you! Who cares for propriety!" it seemed to say. As soon as I shouted, "Kultyapka!" wherever I might be, he would immediately pop up and rush towards me with rapturous squeals, bounding along like a little ball and even tumbling head over heels. I was greatly attached to the ugly little thing. For a time it seemed that fate had only joy and happiness in store for him. But one day the prisoner Neustroyev, who earned some money by making ladies' shoes and tanning skins, began to take particular notice of the little dog. Some thought must have entered his head. He called to Kultyapka, stroked him and rolled him gently over. Kultyapka squealed with pleasure, all unsuspecting. But on the next morning he

was gone. I looked for him for a long time, but found no sign of him anywhere. It was not until two weeks later that I learned what had happened. Neustroyev had taken a fancy to Kultyapka's coat. He had slaughtered the animal, skinned it and lined a pair of ladies' velvet winter boots which the auditor's wife had ordered from him. He even showed me the boots when they were finished. The lining was really very fine. Poor Kultyapka!

Many of our prisoners tanned skins and used to bring in handsome-coated dogs who promptly vanished. Some of the dogs had been stolen and others bought. I remember seeing two prisoners busily discussing something behind the mess barrack. One of them led a magnificent black dog, evidently of an expensive breed. Some rogue of a servant had probably stolen it from his master and sold it to them for some thirty kopeks in silver. The two were preparing to hang it. It was a convenient procedure: they removed the skin and flung the carcass into a cesspool which was located in the remotest part of the yard and stank horribly in the summer heat because it was rarely cleaned. The poor creature seemed to sense what was in store for it. It looked uneasily from one to the other of us three and occasionally ventured a slight wave of its bushy tail curled between its legs as if trying to soften our hearts by this sign of confidence. I walked away as quickly as I could and they, of course, did as they intended.

The geese too came to live with us by sheer chance. To whom they had really belonged I do not know. For a time they greatly amused the prisoners and even came to be known in the town. They had been hatched in the prison and were kept near the mess barrack. When the brood was half grown, it took to following the convicts to work. As soon as the drum began its drubbing and the convicts moved towards the gate, our geese would follow, cackling and flapping their wings. One after an-

other they would skip over the high threshold of the gate and line up at our right flank waiting for the end of the roll-call. They always attached themselves to the biggest party and nibbled about in the grass while the convicts were at work. No sooner did the party make to return, than they would gather too and follow. The rumour about these geese that went to work with the convicts spread far and wide. "There go the convicts with their geese," the people used to say. "How ever did they train them? Here is something for your geese," someone would add proffering a coin. But in spite of all their devotion to us, the geese were all butchered for some feast day.

They would not have slaughtered our goat Vaska for anything in the world had it not been for one special circumstance. I do not know who brought him to us, but we suddenly found that we had a very pretty little white kid on the prison grounds. Everyone came to love him in a few days and he came to be a diversion and even consolation to all of us. The pretext for keeping him was: "We've got a stable, haven't we? And so we must have a goat to keep with the horse." He did not live in the stable, however, but first in the mess barrack and then anywhere he pleased. It was a very graceful and frolicsome creature. He would come tripping to us when called and spring upon the benches and tables. He would playfully butt at the prisoners and was always lively and amusing. One evening, when he had grown fairly large horns, Babai the Lezghian who was sitting on the porch steps with other prisoners took it into his head to attempt a butting contest. They had been butting each other for some time—it was in fact this convict's favourite pastime—when Vaska suddenly leapt on to the porch and, the minute Babai looked away, bunched his little hoofs together and with all his force butted the Lezghian in the back

of the head tumbling him headlong to the delight of everybody and, not least, of Babai himself. In short, everybody was very fond of Vaska. When he grew bigger, a certain operation which our veterinaries could very well perform, was decided upon after a long and earnest debate. "He'll smell if we don't," said the convicts. Vaska, after this, began to grow fat. He was fed, too, as though being deliberately fattened. Finally he came to be a full-grown goat of enormous size with great horns. He was so heavy that he even waddled as he walked and like the geese before him, formed the habit of accompanying us to work to the amusement of the convicts and the people who met us on the way. Everybody knew the prison goat Vaska. Working on the river bank sometimes, the convicts would gather willow twigs, leaves, and flowers and adorn the goat. They twined sprigs and flowers about his horns and hung him all over with garlands. Thus bedecked, Vaska walked at the head of the procession on the way back, the convicts proudly eyeing the passers-by. Their childish delight went so far that someone suggested to gild Vaska's horns. This plan was not carried out, though I remember asking Akim Akimovich, our best gilder after Isaiah Fomich, whether it would be possible to gild a goat's horns. He looked the goat over carefully, pondered the question for a moment and gravely answered that it was perhaps possible, but that "it would not last and would be altogether useless besides." Nothing more was said about it. Vaska would have gone on living with us for a long time and would perhaps have eventually died only from shortness of breath owing to his fatness. But one day as he was leading the prisoners back from work adorned with sprigs and flowers, he caught the eye of the major driving in his drozhki. "Stop!" he roared. "Whose goat is that?" Someone then explained. "What? A goat in the prison without my permission?"

Where is the sergeant?" The latter appeared and was ordered to kill the goat then and there. The carcass was to be skinned and the hide sold in the market, the money payable to the prisoners' fund and the meat to be used for the prison soup. There was much talk and many regrets, but the convicts dared not disobey. Vaska was slaughtered over our cesspool and the carcass was bought by one of the convicts for a ruble and a half. White loaves were purchased with this money and the prisoner who had bought the carcass resold the meat in retail. The meat indeed proved to be very tasty.

A *karagush* eagle, one of the small varieties of the steppes, lived with us for some time too. He had been brought in injured and exhausted. The convicts stood about watching him. The eagle could not fly as his right wing trailed on the ground and one leg seemed dislocated. I well remember the fierce eye of the bird as he looked round at the idle faces, opening his hooked beak and preparing to sell his life dearly. When everyone had looked their fill and the crowd dispersed, he struggled off hopping on one leg and threshing his sound wing, retreating into the farthest corner of the prison where he pressed himself against the stockade. There he lived for about three months, never once leaving his corner. The convicts at first would come to look at him and even set the dog on him. Sharik would rush on fiercely, but stop short obviously afraid—something that greatly amused the convicts. "The brute," they would say. "He won't let anyone at him." Sharik later overcame his fear and grew quite clever at catching the eagle by his injured wing. The bird defended himself with all the strength of his beak and claws and, crouched into his corner, would watch the inquisitive crowd with the fierce gaze of a wounded king. At last everybody grew tired of him and he was left to himself and forgotten. The only signs of attention were scraps of fresh meat thrown to him every day and



a crock of water. Someone must have been taking care of him. He ate nothing for some days, but finally began to take the food, though never from anyone's hand or when people were watching. I kept an eye on him unnoticed from a distance more than once.

Thinking he was alone, he would come out of his corner and hop along the stockade for some twelve paces. He would go back and come again as though taking exercise. When he caught sight of me, he scrambled hastily back to his corner with ungainly leaps and hops and then turned to fight with his head thrown back, his beak half open and feathers ruffled. There was no winning him over with any caresses. He pecked and threshed about refusing to accept bits of meat from me and squatted staring into my eyes with a piercing gaze. Alone and implacably hostile, he waited for death, distrusting every man. The convicts seemed to recollect his presence one day, and though no one had remembered him or troubled about him for two or three months, there was a sudden surge of general sympathy for him. The convicts began to say that he ought to be taken outside of the walls. "If he must die, let him die out of prison!" said some.

"Yes, he's a wild bird and you'll never get him used to prison," others agreed.

"He's not like us, come to think of it," added someone.

"Now that's a stupid thing to say. He's a bird and we are men."

"The eagle is the king of the forests, friends," Skuratov began, but no one listened.

One day, when the drum had drubbed us to work after dinner, the convicts took hold of the eagle, firmly gripping his beak to prevent him from fighting, and carried him into the open. When they reached the rampart, some twelve of the men huddled together to watch where

the eagle would go when released. Strangely, all seemed exhilarated as though it was they who were to be released.

"Just look at the scoundrel! You do him a good turn and he keeps trying to bite you," said the man who was holding the vicious bird, regarding it almost affectionately.

"Let go, Nikitka!"

"He knows what he wants! He wants his freedom, real honest free freedom."

They flung the eagle from the rampart into the steppes. It was late autumn, a cold dark day. The wind whistled over the bare spaces and ruffled the dry yellow sweep of steppe grass. The eagle ran in a straight line, flapping his injured wing as if he were hurrying no matter where if only to get away from us. The prisoners' eyes followed him curiously as his head bobbed up again and again in the grass.

"Just look at him," said someone thoughtfully.

"He doesn't even look back," added another. "He hasn't looked back once, friends! He just keeps running."

"Did you expect him to come back and say 'thank you'?" scoffed a third.

"I should say not. He's felt his freedom!"

"Yes, freedom is freedom!"

"I can't see him any more, brothers!"

"What are you standing there for? March on!" shouted the guard. And we trudged away in silence.

## VII

### GRIEVANCE

At the beginning of this chapter the editor of the late Alexander Petrovich Goryanchikov's notes believes it necessary to notify the reader of the following.

There was mention of a parricide, a former nobleman,

in the first chapter of the *Notes from a Dead House*. The author mentioned him as an example of the unfeeling way in which some convicts spoke of their crimes. It was also said that though the murderer had not confessed his crime, the facts presented by people who knew the story were so clear that it was impossible to doubt his guilt. They had told the author that the criminal's conduct had been thoroughly disreputable, that he had been encumbered with debts and had indeed murdered his father to inherit money. Everybody in the town where the parricide had formerly lived told the same story. The present editor has had this point corroborated too. Finally, the notes state that the murderer was in excellent spirits while in prison, that he was indeed flighty and highly irresponsible, though far from a fool, but that the author never saw any signs of cruelty in him. He also adds: "I need not say that I did not believe him guilty of the crime."

A few days ago, the publisher of these notes received word from Siberia that this convict was in fact innocent and had suffered ten years of penal servitude unjustly. His innocence was officially established in court. The real murderers had confessed and the unhappy man has been released. There is no doubt as to the authenticity of this.

There is nothing more to add and there is no need to enlarge on the tragedy of the young life ruined by this terrible accusation. The fact itself is eloquent enough.

I think that the mere possibility of such a thing adds a new and striking detail to the *Notes from a Dead House*.

And now to resume.

I have said that I at last grew accustomed to prison, but this "as last" was very painful and came all too slowly. It took me almost a year in fact and that year

was the hardest in my life. It is for this reason that it is so firmly fixed in my memory as a whole. I believe I remember every hour in its proper sequence. I have also said that the other prisoners were not able *to get used* to the life any better. I remember wondering many times in the course of that year: "What about them? How do they feel? Are they really used to it? Are they really resigned?" I was very curious to know. I have already remarked that the convicts lived in their barracks as though they were merely spending the night in a wayside inn or at a halt on a march. Even those who had been sentenced to life imprisonment were restless and full of longing, and each of them had a dream of something that verged on the miraculous. This eternal restlessness was obvious, though never expressed. That strange feverishness and impatience of inadvertently voiced hopes, sometimes so unsound that they seemed like figments of delirium, and, strangely enough, sometimes harboured by the most sober and practical men, lent a weird character to the place and perhaps constituted its most typical feature. I did feel almost from the first glance that this element was something peculiar to the prison alone. Everybody was day-dreaming and one could see this at once. It struck me morbidly, because this day-dreaming gave most of the convicts a sullen, grim and somewhat unhealthy look. The great majority were taciturn, venomously malicious and jealously concealed their hopes. Candour and simplicity were scorned. The wilder their hopes and the more the dreamers realized it, the more obstinately did they hide them from all eyes, but give them up they could not. Some of them, perhaps, were secretly ashamed of them. There is much soberness in the Russian character, much irony directed against oneself. It was this constant, secret dissatisfaction with oneself, perhaps, that accounted for their impatience with one another, their intolerance and deri-

sion. If one of them, more simple-minded or impatient than the others, expressed aloud what was in everybody's heart, giving rein to his dreams and hopes, he was at once rudely cut short and ridiculed. I even think the most zealous taunters were perhaps those whose dreams and hopes were wildest. I have said that the naïve and simple-hearted were regarded as the commonest fools and treated with contempt. Every man had grown so sullen and self-centred that he had long begun to despise anyone who was natural and good. Apart from these simple-hearted talkers, the rest, that is the silent sort, were sharply divided into the kind and the ill-natured, the cheerful and the gloomy. The gloomy and ill-natured were by far the most numerous. If some of them happened to be talkative by nature, they would invariably be tireless scandal-mongers and jealous trouble-makers. They liked to meddle in everybody else's business, though they did not reveal anything of what was on their own minds; they felt that this would be improper. The kind sort—only a handful—nursed their hopes in secret and were, of course, more disposed to dream. It seemed to me too that there was yet another category—those who had long despaired, such as the old man from Starodubye for instance. Their number was few. The old man, I have mentioned him before, lived very peaceably, but from certain signs I could gather that his mental state was awful. He had his own salvation: prayer and the idea of martyrdom. The prisoner who was a zealous reader of the bible, I have mentioned him too before, the one who went out of his mind and hurled a brick at the major, was probably also one of those who had abandoned themselves to despair. And since life deprived of all hope is impossible, he had thought up a solution for himself in the form of voluntary and almost artificial martyrdom. He told that his attack on the major had not been prompted by malice, but solely by the desire to

suffer. Who can tell what psychological process had worked itself out in his soul. No man can live without aim or hope. Without hope and purpose, a man often turns into a monster out of sheer misery. The purpose that sustained all of us was freedom and release from prison.

Here I am trying to classify the convicts, but can such a thing really be done? Reality is infinitely varied compared even with the subtlest workings of abstract thought and does not tolerate broad, clear-cut distinctions. Reality strives for infinite gradation. We too had a life of our own, poor though it may have been. By this I mean not the outward, but the inner life.

I have already made some mention of the fact that at the beginning of my imprisonment I was unable to penetrate to the inner essence of this life and that its outward manifestations, therefore, were a constant torment to me. At times I was ready to hate my fellow-sufferers. I even envied them and cursed my own fate. I envied them because they were among their own kind, among companions whom they could understand, though actually they were just as weary and disgusted as I with this community under the lash and rod, this enforced companionship, and each of them longed to get away from it. I repeat that the envy that visited me in moments of bitterness had its reasons. Decidedly wrong are those who say that a nobleman or intellectual or the like bears exactly the same hardships in our convict prisons and penal establishments as any peasant. I have heard of that theory recently and even read about it. The premise of it is good and humane: "Prisoners are all human and all humans should be equal." The idea is too abstract, however. It loses sight of a great many practical details, which only experience discloses. I do not mean that the feelings of the cultivated men are more refined or that their spiritual development is greater. It is difficult to

apply any standards to the soul and its feelings. Education is no criterion here. I shall be the first to admit that some of these sufferers from among the most ignorant and oppressed showed the most refined sensitivity. It sometimes happened in prison that I would know a man for several years, despising him as little better than a brute when a chance moment would reveal his soul in an involuntary outburst of such wealth of feeling, such clear understanding of the suffering of others that I could hardly believe what I myself saw and heard. The opposite too might happen. Education sometimes coexisted with such barbarity and cynicism that I was nauseated and no matter how favourably biassed I might have been before, could find neither pardon nor excuse in my heart.

I say nothing of the change of habits, the mode of life, food, and other things, which are of course harder to bear for a man of the higher walks of life than for a peasant who might have gone hungry when free and who at least ate his fill in prison. I may grant that for a man of will all this is trivial compared with other hardships, though the change of habits is in reality no trifling matter at all. There are inconveniences so hard in comparison with all this that one does not mind the filthy surroundings, the restraints, the scanty and unclean food. The most delicate of gentlemen, the most pampered of molly-coddles will eat black bread and cabbage soup with black-beetles after he has worked all day by the sweat of his brow. He might even get used to it, as is said in one of the convicts' songs about a fine gentleman who landed in prison:

*They give me cabbage leaves and water  
And you just watch me tuck it in.*

But what is most important is that every *commoner* began to feel *at home* within two hours of his arrival, a full-fledged member of the prison community. They all

understood him and he them. They all knew him and thought of him as of one of themselves. It was quite different with the gentleman. However good, wise, and upright he might be, he would be hated and despised for years by everybody. The convicts would not understand him and, most important, would not trust him. He could never be a comrade of theirs, and though he might finally achieve a state in which no one would offend him, he would remain a stranger to them and be eternally tormented by this isolation. This was not always due to malice on the part of the prisoners, it came about unconsciously. He was not one of them and that was all there was to it. There is nothing more terrible than to be out of one's element. A peasant who has been sent from Taganrog to Petropavlovsk will find exactly the same kind of Russian peasant there, settle down with him and feel perfectly at home in his hut within two hours. It is all quite different for the noblemen. They are divided from the common people by the deepest of gulfs, and this is felt *fully* only when one of them is suddenly stripped of his privileges. Otherwise, he may associate with the people all his life, meet them day by day for forty years in the civil service or other official places, he may even be a benefactor, a father to them, so to speak, and will yet never know what they are really like. All that he sees will be an optical illusion. I know that everyone who reads these lines will say that I am exaggerating, but I am sure that it is true nonetheless. I have reached this conclusion not through books, but by experience and have had quite enough time to verify it. Some day everybody, perhaps, will realize how true this is.

Events seemed to conspire to confirm my observations from the first moment, and affected me poignantly. That first summer I wandered about, always alone. I have already said that I was not in a state of mind to recognize or appreciate those who might have liked me and



who indeed did like me in later days, though we never came to be on an equal footing. I had acquaintances among former noblemen too, but found no consolation in their companionship. I was wearied of everything, but there was no getting away.

Here is an incident that right at the outset made me realize my isolation and the peculiarity of my position. Towards the end of July, that same summer, the prisoners began to line up in the prison yard one morning. It was getting on for twelve of a hot day, the time when we usually rested before the afternoon's work. I had not known what was in the offing until that very moment. I had been so absorbed in myself that I hardly noticed that the convicts had been astir for fully three days. Perhaps it had begun even earlier, as I thought later when I recalled some of the prisoners' talk and their particularly bitter mood. I had set it down to the heavy work, the sultry dreary days, the involuntary dreams of freedom in the forests and fields and the short nights which gave us insufficient rest. Perhaps it had all contributed to the present outburst, the pretext for which was the food. During the past few days there had been much grumbling in the barracks and especially in the mess barrack at dinner or supper time. The convicts were dissatisfied with the cooks and even replaced one of them, but turned the new one out immediately and took the old one back.

"The work is hard and they feed us on tripe and nothing else," someone would grumble in the mess barrack.

"You'd better order blancmange if you don't like it," retorted another.

"I'm very fond of tripe in my soup, friends," a third would put in. "It's good."

"And if you get nothing but tripe every day, you still say it's good?"

"It's the season for beef of course," a fourth would remark. "We slave away at the kilns and all they give us is tripe. A man wants something that he can get his teeth into."

"If it's not tripe it's crazybits."\*

"Crazy, that's what I call it. Tripe or crazybits, one or the other. Fine food for a man! Is that right?"

"Yes, the food is rotten."

"He's lining his pockets."

"It's not supposed to be our business."

"Whose then? My belly is my business all right. If the whole community filed a grievance that would help."

"A grievance?"

"That's it."

"Evidently they haven't drubbed you enough for that other grievance, blockhead!"

"That's true enough," mumbled another. "Haste makes waste. You'd better tell us just what you want to say in that grievance, you dolt."

"Why not? I would tell them if everyone came out too. But the thing is that some have to eat the prison stuff and others buy their own."

"There goes green-eye again—getting worked up over somebody else's luck."

"Don't gape at another's cake, but get up and see what you can bake."

"What do you mean bake? I'm not going to argue with you until my hair turns grey. You must be rich if you're ready to sit around and do nothing."

"Yeroshka is rich, has a cat and a bitch!"

"But really, why should we keep quiet, friends? Haven't we put up with enough? They're skinning us alive. Why shouldn't we come out against it?"

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\* I.e., haslets; the prisoners distorted the word on purpose.  
—*Author's note.*

"Why! Do you want us to explain? We're in prison, that's why!"

"There you are—let the people fall out and the governors go on a bout!"

"That's right, Eight-Eyes has got fat on us and he's bought a pair of greys."

"He likes his bottle, too."

"He had a fight with the vet at cards the other day."

"They'd been playing all night and then fought for two hours. Fedka told me."

"That's why it's always tripe."

"Oh, you fools! It's not for you to file grievances."

"But if we all come out, what excuse can he make? We'll stand firm."

"Excuse! He'll whack you over the mug and that'll be his excuse."

"And have you on trial besides."

In short, they were all restless. The food was truly poor at that time. But there were other troubles too. Most important, however, was the general depression and the endless secret anguish. The convict is cranky and rebellious by nature, but it is rare for a large group to rebel in a body, and the reason is their eternal discord. They realized this themselves and there was more violent talk, therefore, than action. The excitement this time was not altogether futile, however. The convicts began to gather in clusters in the yard, or heatedly discussed matters in the barracks, swearing as they recalled the major's entire rule until even the smallest details were dragged to light. There were some who were particularly excited. No affair of this sort can come off without its ringleaders and agitators. They are generally conspicuous not only in prison, but also in factories, army units, and so on. True to type everywhere, they are hot-headed men eager for justice and full of the

childlike conviction that it is certainly and, above all, immediately possible. They are no more stupid than other people and some in fact are rather intelligent, but they are too hot-headed to be cautious and calculating. There are also men who under such circumstances can guide the masses very shrewdly and win their cause, but such are rare among us. Now those of whom I am speaking, the fomenters of grievances, invariably lose their cause and come to fill our prisons and penal barracks. But if they lose because of their hot-headedness, it is precisely their hot-headedness which influences those who surround them and follow them willingly. Their ardour and honest indignation impress everybody and force the most irresolute to join them in the end. Their blind confidence in success seduces even the most hardened sceptics, though their confidence sometimes is based on such absurd and childlike reasoning that an outsider can only wonder and shake his head. The main thing is that they march in the van without fear. Like maddened bulls, they rush forward, horns down and eyes closed without heeding anything, utterly devoid of that practical casuistry by which even the most debased and abject creature often wins his cause and emerges unscathed. As for themselves, they always break their horns. In ordinary daily existence, they are peevish, irritable, and intolerant. Very frequently, they are awfully narrow-minded as well, which, however, constitutes part of their strength. The most annoying thing about them is that instead of making directly for their object, they often go off at a tangent and fritter their strength away on trifles. This brings them to disaster of course. The masses, nonetheless, are well able to understand them and therein lies their power. But let me say a few words about the things that are filed as *a grievance*.

We had several among us who had come to prison solely through having filed a grievance, and it was they

who were the most agitated now. One in particular was Martynov who had once served in the Hussars. He was a hot-headed, restless and suspicious man, though honest and upright. Another was Vasily Antonov, a man cold-bloodedly irascible, with an insolent look, a smile of sarcastic arrogance, unusually intelligent and equally truthful and upright. There were too many to mention them all. Petrov scurried about as well, listening to every group of men without saying anything. He was obviously excited and was the first to rush out of the barrack to take his place in the line.

The sergeant on duty came out at once in a fright. The men drawn up in ranks politely told him that the convicts wished to speak to the major. The invalids had come out too and lined up opposite the prisoners. The request was extraordinary and filled the sergeant with dismay. Still, he did not dare to delay informing the major. First, if the convicts were acting in a body, something worse might happen presently. Our authorities all seemed to live in fear of the convicts. Secondly, if nothing came of it and the men dispersed, he, the sergeant, would be obliged to report the matter to the authorities in any case. Pale and trembling, he hurried off to the major without attempting to interrogate or reason with the convicts. He could see that it was useless.

Without knowing what it was all about I too had taken my place in the line. I did not learn anything until afterward. I thought that this was some sort of roll-call, but was surprised and began to look round when I saw that no sentries came to check us. The men's faces were excited and angry, and some were pale. All were silent and tensely expectant. Many of them, I noticed too, looked at me with great surprise, but then turned away without saying anything. They must have thought it strange that I too had lined up with them and wanted

to present a grievance. Soon, however, all those who stood about me turned again and regarded me questioningly.

"What are you doing here?" asked Vasily Antonov rudely and for all to hear. He stood some distance from me. Until that moment he had always been polite.

I looked at him perplexed, already sensing that something extraordinary was afoot.

"That's right, what are you standing here for? Get back to the barrack," said a young man of the military section who had never spoken to me before. He was a kind, quiet fellow. "It's not for you to be here."

"But everybody's here," I answered. "I thought there was a roll-call."

"He's come crawling out too," shouted somebody.

"Iron beak!" called another.

"Fly-smasher!" barked a third with unspeakable contempt. The new nickname raised a laugh.

"His Honour does come to the mess barrack now and then."

"They're well off everywhere. Here they're in prison, but living on white bread and suckling-pigs. You eat your own food, don't you, so why come here?"

"This is no place for you," said Kulikov breezily. He took me by the arm and led me away.

He was pale, his black eyes flashing as he bit his lower lip. He was anything but composed as he waited for the major. I liked to watch Kulikov at such times, which is when a man has to prove what he is worth. He liked to make a show of himself, but did his part well. I am sure that he would have gone even to his execution with a certain chic. Now that all were snapping at me, he deliberately redoubled his politeness. At the same time his words contained a command which brooked no objection.

"It's our own affair, Alexander Petrovich, and it has nothing to do with you. You'd better go somewhere and

wait. Your people are over there in the kitchen. Better join them!"

I could just glimpse our Poles through the open windows of the mess barrack, and it seemed to me that there were many others there as well. Puzzled, I went to the mess barrack pursued by laughter, oaths, and booing

"He doesn't like us! Yah, yah, yah! At 'im!"

I had never been so humiliated before and found it very hard to bear. It was just an unfortunate moment. I met T-vsky\* in the passage of the mess barrack. He was one of the gentlemen, a young man of firm and generous character who was very fond of B.; he was not very well educated though. The convicts had singled him out among us and even liked him in a sense. He was brave, manly, and strong, as his every gesture showed.

"What's the matter with you, Goryanchikov," he called. "Come in!"

"But what's happening out there?"

"They are presenting a grievance, don't you know? Nothing will come of it, of course. Who'll ever believe the convicts? They'll be looking for ringleaders and if we turn out too, they'll put the blame on us. Remember why we have been sent here in the first place! They'll get nothing but a flogging, but we will be put on trial. The major hates us all and this will give him just what he is waiting for. And besides, he'll use us to clear himself."

"The convicts would not hesitate to give us away either," added M-sky as we entered the mess room.

"They would not pity us, never fear!" agreed T-vsky.

Besides the gentlemen, there were many others, about thirty in all. They had stayed behind, unwilling to join in for various reasons: some out of cowardice, others

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\* Reference is to Simon Tokarzewski, member of a Polish peasants' organization that fought against serfdom. In 1907 he published a book, *Seven Years of Hard Labour*.—Ed.

because they thought it was useless. One of them was Akim Akimovich, an inveterate enemy of all such actions which went counter to good conduct and the normal course of duty. He was tranquilly awaiting the end of the affair not at all worried over the outcome, but on the contrary perfectly convinced in the ultimate triumph of order and the will of the authorities. Isaiah Fomich too was there, completely perplexed and rather dejected, though eagerly and apprehensively listening to our talk. He was greatly worried. The common Poles were with us too, as well as a few timid souls from among the Russians, people who were always silent and crushed. They had not been able to muster the courage to come out with the others and were despondently waiting to see what the end would be. Finally, there were some grim convicts who were fearless enough, but had stayed out of the spirit of contradiction and the scornful conviction that it would all come to nothing in the end. They were not altogether sure of themselves, however, and felt awkward. Though convinced that they were quite right—and it later grew clear that they were—they felt much like apostates, as if they had betrayed their comrades to the major. Yolkin was there too, the sly Siberian peasant who had been sent to us for counterfeiting and who had ousted Kulikov from his veterinary practice. The old man from Starodubye was there as well. Every one of the cooks had stayed away, probably feeling that they were part and parcel of the authorities and that it was not fitting for them to come out with the others.

“Look here,” I objected irresolutely, addressing M-sky, “almost everybody has gone out except these here.”

“What has that to do with us?” grumbled B.

“We should have risked a hundred times more if we had gone out, and what for? *Je haïs les brigands!* Do you seriously believe for one moment that this grievance



will do any good? Why should we involve ourselves in their mess?"

"Nothing will come of it," put in one of the convicts, an obstinate and embittered old man. Almazov who was present was quick to express agreement.

"Nothing, but for about fifty of them getting a flogging."

"The major has come!" shouted somebody and we all rushed to the windows.

The major had galloped in, wild with rage, flushed and bespectacled. Silently but resolutely he approached the front rank. He was really bold in such cases and never lost his head. But then, he was nearly always drunk. Even his dirty orange cap-band and tarnished silver epaulettes had something sinister about them at the moment. He was followed closely by Dyatlov, the clerk, a very important man who actually ruled the prison and had influence over the major as well. He was a sly man, but not a bad one. The prisoners had nothing against him. The third was our sergeant who had plainly been put through the most terrible scolding and was expecting another ten times as bad. Finally, there came three or four guards. The prisoners who had been standing bare-headed from the moment that the major had been sent for now straightened up to a man, shifted from one foot to the other and froze to attention, in anticipation of the first word or rather the first yell of the chief.

It was not long in coming. His second word came out at the top of his voice, even in a scream. He was beside himself. From our window we could see him hurling himself at the prisoners, demanding this and that. We could hear neither questions nor replies, but only his disjointed shrieks.

"Mutiny!... The gauntlet!... Ringleaders! You're a ringleader! You too!" He pounced on someone.

The answer could not be heard, but a minute later we saw the prisoner separate himself from the others and walk towards the guardroom. Then another followed and then a third.

"I'll have you all on trial! I'll show you! Who's there in the mess room?" he shrieked, catching sight of us through the open window. "Drive 'em all out at once!"

The clerk Dyatlov came into the mess room. When he was told that we had no grievance, he returned to the major.

"Oh, they haven't?" he said in a slightly lower key, evidently very pleased to hear it. "It doesn't matter. Bring them here."

We went out. I sensed that everyone among us felt awkward, and there was indeed a hangdog air about us as we walked.

"Ah, Prokofiev and Yolkin too and you, Almazov. Line up over there!" said the major hurriedly yet gently, looking at us graciously. "M-sky is here too," he remarked. "Very well. Dyatlov, make a list of their names. Put them all down, those who are satisfied in one list and those who are not in another. Put them all down, to the last man, and bring the documents to me. I'll put you all under arrest. I'll show you, scoundrels!"

The threat had its effect.

"We're satisfied," came a sullen hesitating voice from among the prisoners.

"So you're satisfied, are you? Who's satisfied? Let everyone who is satisfied step forward."

"We're satisfied, we're satisfied," came other voices.

"You're satisfied? So you were led astray? So there were ringleaders? Trouble-makers? So much the worse for them!"

"Good God, what is this coming to?" came a voice from the crowd.

"Who said that?" roared the major rushing in the direction from which the voice had come. "Was it you, Rastorguyev? Off to the guardroom!"

Rastorguyev, a tall puffy-faced young fellow, stepped out and walked slowly towards the guardroom. It was not he who had spoken, but the choice had fallen on him and he did not protest.

"You've grown too fat! That's what's the matter with you!" the major howled after him. "Look at that mug of his! I'll find you all! Step forward all those who are satisfied!"

"We're satisfied, your Honour," cried scores of glum voices, but the remainder were obstinately silent, and that, evidently, was all that the major needed. It was to his advantage to end this matter as quickly as possible.

"Ah, so now you're *all* satisfied," he concluded in some haste. "I could see it. I knew it. It is the trouble-makers who are at the bottom of this. We'll find them, we'll investigate it more fully," he added to Dyatlov. "But now it's time for work. Sound the drum!"

He was present in person at the work roll-call. The prisoners marched away sadly and silently, pleased that they were at least getting out of his sight. Afterwards, the major went to the guardroom and dealt with the ringleaders, though not too harshly. He seemed in a hurry to be done with it all. One of them, it was said, had asked for pardon and was immediately forgiven. It was plain that the major was not quite himself, or perhaps even a little frightened. A grievance is a ticklish matter and though the prisoners' action could not really be called a grievance as it had not been addressed to the higher authorities but to the major himself, it was awkward nonetheless, not the right thing. It was particularly disconcerting because it was so unanimous. He had to hush it up at whatever cost. The alleged ringleaders

were soon released and the very next day the food improved though not for long. The major began to visit the prison more frequently and found fault more often. Our sergeant went about in something of a daze, as though he had not yet recovered from his shock. As for the convicts, they could not calm down for a long time. They were not as excited as before, but were somehow worried and perplexed. Some seemed even crestfallen. Others parried all reference to the unfortunate affair with a grumble. There were some who made bitter fun of themselves for having thought of a grievance in the first place.

"It's easier said than done," someone would say.

"If you want some fun, you've got to pay for it."

"It's not for mice to bell the cat."

"Our kind doesn't know a thing until he feels the club. Lucky thing we weren't all flogged!"

"We'll know more and talk less in the future," somebody would angrily remark.

"Who do you think you are, a teacher?"

"I'm teaching no harm, anyway!"

"But who are you to teach?"

"I've been a man until now, and you?"

"You're something that the dog left lying around."

"That's what you are."

"Keep quiet, will you, for the love of God! Stop this row!" shouted everybody.

On the evening of the day of the grievance I met Petrov behind the barracks as I returned from work. He had been looking for me. He came up and muttered two or three vague exclamations, but soon fell into preoccupied silence as he walked at my side. I could not get over the events of the day and hoped that Petrov would clear up some of the points for me.

"Tell me, Petrov," I said to him, "you and your friends are angry with us, aren't you?"

"Who is angry?" he asked with a start.

"Why, the convicts must be angry with us, the gentlemen."

"Why should they be?"

"Because we did not come out with the rest."

"But what was there for you to present a grievance about?" he was puzzled. "You eat your own food, don't you?"

"O Lord! But some of you eat your own food too! And we should have come out—as your comrades, you know."

"You—our comrades?" He was genuinely surprised.

I glanced at him: he did not understand what I was driving at, but I understood him very well. For the first time a problem which had long been troubling me lay perfectly clear. I suddenly understood something which I had only vaguely guessed until then: I could never be their comrade even if I were the convict of convicts, even if I were to stay in prison for ever and a day, and in the special section too. But what remains clearest in my memory is Petrov's look at that moment. There was such simple-hearted perplexity in it as he said, "You—our comrade?" I sought for some tinge of irony, bitterness or mockery in his voice, but found nothing of the kind. I was simply no comrade and that was all there was to it. "You go your way and we shall go ours," he seemed to imply. "You have your own life and we have ours."

I expected that the convicts would harry us to death after that unfortunate grievance, but there was nothing of the sort, not the slightest reproach, no outbursts of malice. They kept upbraiding us whenever they could as they had done before and not one whit more. I should note, however, that neither were they at all angry with those of their own kind who had refused to associate themselves with the grievance and had stayed behind

in the mess barrack or with those who had been the first to shout that they were satisfied. The matter was not even mentioned. And that was something which I could not understand.

## VIII

### COMRADES

I was naturally most drawn to my own kind, to the noblemen, especially at first. But of the three Russian former noblemen we had in prison (Akim Akimovich, the informer A-v, and the alleged parricide), I associated and talked only with Akim Akimovich. I approached him in moments of desperation, in moments of most intense boredom, when there was no one to turn to. In the last chapter I attempted to classify our prisoners, but I think I shall have to put Akim Akimovich in a class of his own, the class of the completely indifferent. There were no convicts who were absolutely indifferent, of course, nor could there be a man who did not care whether he lived in prison or in freedom. But Akim Akimovich was almost an exception. He had settled himself in prison as though prepared to spend the rest of his life there: everything around him, beginning with his mattress, pillows, and household utensils, had been arranged with an air of permanence, as though meant to last. There was nothing temporary or improvised about them. He still had many years to spend in prison, but I doubt if he ever dreamed of his release. Still, if he had reconciled himself to reality, he had not done so out of inclination, but out of subordination, which was quite the same for him. He was a good-natured man and even helped me with some advice and services. He bored me to distraction, however, especially at the beginning and thus intensified the wretchedness of my state of mind. And yet it was precisely boredom that made me talk

to him. I would hunger sometimes for a living word or two, however bitter, spiteful or impatient, if only to curse our fate in unison. But he continued silently to paste his lanterns or told me how his regiment had been reviewed in such and such a year, who had commanded the division, his name and patronymic, his opinion of the review, how the firing signals had been changed and so on; all this in a dignified voice as monotonous as water falling drop by drop. He showed hardly more enthusiasm as he related how the Order of St. Anna had been given him to wear on his sword for some battle in which he had fought in the Caucasus. The only difference was a deeper shade of dignity in his voice. He even lowered it a little at the mention of St. Anna and solemnly paused for three minutes or so before he went on. In that first year there were stupid moments in which I suddenly began to hate Akim Akimovich for no reason and silently cursed my fate that had made him my neighbour on the plank shelf. Within an hour I would usually reproach myself for this. But that was only in my first year there. Eventually I grew completely reconciled to Akim Akimovich and much ashamed of my former stupidity. Outwardly we never quarrelled as far as I can remember.

Besides the three Russians, eight other gentlemen turned up in the prison during my term. I associated closely with some of them, but not with all. Even the best of them were morbidly irritable, intolerant and unsociable. I indeed stopped talking to two of them. Only three were cultivated men. B., M-sky and old Zh-ky,\* who had once been a professor of mathematics; he was

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\* Reference is to Josef Zochowski, history and natural science teacher. Was sentenced to capital punishment for participation in the 1848 Warsaw uprising. The sentence was changed to ten years hard labour. Zochowski died in the Omsk convict prison in 1851.—*Ed.*

a kindly old eccentric and apparently narrow-minded in spite of his education. M-sky and B. were quite different. I made friends with M-sky from the start. I never quarrelled with him and truly respected him, though I could never really grow attached to him. He was deeply distrustful and embittered, but could control himself surprisingly well. But it was just that trait which I disliked in him: I somehow felt that he would never open his heart to anybody. Perhaps I was mistaken. He had a strong and noble nature. His extraordinary and even somewhat Jesuitical skill and caution in handling people betrayed his profound scepticism. And yet he had a heart capable of suffering from this duality of scepticism and deep unshakeable convictions and hopes. In spite of his worldly wisdom, however, there was irreconcilable enmity between him and B. and T-vsky. The former was a consumptive, very nervous and irritable, but kind and even generous by nature. His irritability ran to extreme capriciousness and intolerance. I could not bear his character and finally broke with him, though I never ceased to like him, while I never quarrelled with M-sky though I disliked him. When I broke with B. I had also to part with T-vsky, the young man I mentioned in the previous chapter. This I was very sorry to do. Though not well educated he was good-natured and manly, in short a fine young man. But the thing was that he respected and loved B. so well that he regarded anyone who had fallen out with B. as his own personal enemy. Though loath to do so, he broke with M-sky after a time for the same reason. All of them, however, were sick in spirit, jaundiced, irritable, and distrustful. This was only natural. Things were hard for them, even harder than for us. They were all far from their own country, some of them exiled for ten, twelve years and, what was even more important, they were deeply prejudiced against all who surrounded them, seeing only brutish-



ness and refusing to recognize a single good feature, a single sign of humanity. This too was easy to understand. The force of circumstances, fate itself had driven them to this unhappy point of view. It was clear that they were stifled with misery. They were pleasant and friendly with the Circassians, the Tatars, and Isaiah Fomich, but avoided all the others with disgust. Only the Starodubye Old Faith believer had earned their full respect. It is remarkable that throughout my term there was not a convict who reproached them for their origin, creed or way of thinking, something that our common people do, though rarely, to foreigners and especially to Germans. Even when speaking to Germans in this vein, they hardly ever go further than ridicule. In the eyes of the common people there is something comical about the German. The convicts treated our foreigners respectfully, I should say much more so than us the Russians. They *let them strictly be*, though the latter never seemed able to appreciate this. But to return to T-vsky. It was he who had carried B. in his arms almost all the way on their march to our prison. B., unwell and feeble, could never stand more than half a day's march. They had first been sent to U-gorsk where they had lived in better circumstances than here. But they had entered into an innocent correspondence with convicts of another town and the authorities, therefore, deemed it necessary to send the three of them to our prison where they could be watched more closely. The third man was Zh-sky. Before their arrival M-sky had been the only one in the prison. How much misery he must have suffered all by himself in the first year of his exile.

This Zh-sky was the old man who was always praying. Our political convicts were all young. Only Zh-sky was over fifty. He was an honest man, but somehow odd. His comrades B. and T-vsky disliked him and avoided talking to him when they could. They described

him as stubborn and quarrelsome. Just how right they were I do not know. People are sooner liable to quarrel and conceive hatreds in prison or any other such place where they are herded together against their will, than in freedom. There are many reasons for this, but when all is said and done, Zh-sky was really very narrow-minded and perhaps a disagreeable man. His other compatriots could not get on with him either. I never quarrelled with him, but was not particularly friendly with him either. I think he knew his subject, mathematics, very well. In his broken Russian, more than once, he tried to explain some special cosmic system he had invented. I was told that he had once published an article about it, but that his learned colleagues had only laughed at him. I have the impression that his mind was wandering. He used to spend days on end on his knees praying and this gained him the general respect of the convicts, a respect which he enjoyed until the day he died. I saw him die in our hospital after a severe illness. The respect of the convicts, however, he won after his encounter with the major the day he was brought to our prison. All three had long beards when they first came because they had not been shaven all the way from U-gorsk and the major was enraged at this flagrant breach of rules for which they were not in the least to blame.

"What a state they're in!" he roared. "They look like tramps, brigands!"

Zh-sky, who did not understand Russian well, thought that he was asking who they were, tramps or brigands?

"We're not tramps but political prisoners."

"Wh-a-a-t? What back-talk is this? To me?" the major roared again. "To the guardroom with him! Give him a hundred this very instant!"

The old man laid down under the rods without protest, sank his teeth into his hand and endured the pun-

ishment without a sound or moving a muscle. Meanwhile, B. and T-vsky had entered the prison and M-sky who had been waiting for them at the gates fell on their necks though he had never seen them before. They agitatedly told him what had happened to Zh-sky.

"I was beside myself," M-sky told me afterwards. "I was shaking as though in a fever. I waited for Zh-sky near the gate. He would be coming that way from the guardroom. Suddenly the side gate was flung open and the old man appeared, very pale, with quivering bloodless lips. He walked without looking to left or right through the crowd of convicts who had gathered in the yard upon hearing that a gentleman was being flogged. He entered the barrack, went to his place, sank to his knees and began to pray. The convicts were amazed, even moved. When I saw that old grey-headed man who had left his country, his wife and children, when I saw him on his knees praying to God I rushed away behind the barracks and could not come to myself for two hours." The convicts conceived a great regard for Zh-sky from that time and always treated him with marked respect. They were particularly impressed with the fact that he had endured the punishment in silence.

To tell the whole truth, however, the attitude of the authorities in Siberia towards the gentlemen convicts, whoever they may be, Poles or Russians, should not be judged by this episode which merely shows that one may come across a vicious man and that the prisoner's lot might be well nigh hopeless if such a brute were in sole command. It must be admitted on the other hand that the highest authorities in Siberia on whom the tone and temper of all their subordinates depend are very scrupulous in their dealings with convict noblemen and sometimes even disposed to treat them with indulgence. The reasons are self-evident. To begin with, these authorities are themselves sprung from the nobility; sec-

ondly, it has happened that a nobleman has refused to submit to corporal punishment and attacked the executioners with fearful results; thirdly, and most important, some time before, indeed some thirty-five years earlier, a great wave of upper class convicts had suddenly come to Siberia. In thirty years, these men had amply shown their worth and compelled respect throughout Siberia. In my day the authorities, from long-standing habit, could not regard the educated prisoners of a certain category as they did other convicts. Following the example of their superiors, the lower officials gradually adopted the same attitude. Many of them, however, were dully insensitive, exchanged whispered criticism of their superiors' attitude and would have been greatly pleased if only allowed to manage things in their own way. But they were not—not entirely. I have good reasons for thinking this and here they are: the second section to which I belonged was confined in fortresses under military command and was far harder to endure than the other two sections, that is, the third (serving in the factories) and the first (serving in the mines). It was harder not only for the noblemen but for the others as well, because the organization of this category was entirely military, much like the penal battalions in Russia. The military command was harsher, the discipline stricter; we were always in chains and under guard and lock and key. Matters were not so rigorously seen to in the other two sections, or so, at least, our convicts said and there were some among them who knew it by experience. They would all have been glad to get into the first section which was officially the hardest and in fact even dreamed of doing so. On the other hand, they spoke with horror of the penal battalions, claiming that in all Russia there could be nothing worse than the penal battalions in the fortresses, and that Siberia was something like paradise as compared with the life there. Conse-

quently, if certain indulgences were shown to our noblemen in conditions as severe as they were in our section under military rule, under the very eyes of the Governor General, when officious by-standers were ready to report to the proper quarters out of malice or zeal that unreliable commandants were inclined to show leniency to some criminals, if the educated prisoners were treated differently even in such a place, then they must have most assuredly received even better treatment in the first and third sections. That is why I think I may judge all Siberia by the place in which I found myself. All the rumours and stories which reached me on this score from the convicts of the first and third sections confirmed my opinion. There can be no doubt that gentlemen were treated with greater caution and consideration in our prison. There was no indulgence with respect to work or living conditions: we did the same work, wore the same sort of fetters, and were locked up like the others, in short, everything was the same. It was impossible indeed to show us any indulgence in such matters. I know for certain that in *so recent old times* there had been so many informers, so much intrigue and digging of pitfalls in our town that the authorities were naturally afraid of informers. And what could have been more terrible at that time than the report that a certain class of criminals were being treated more leniently than the others. Everyone, therefore, was apprehensive and we lived on the same footing in all respects but one, corporal punishment. If we had committed some offence, we too would have been flogged without much ado, as required by duty and the principle of equality for all prisoners, but there was little chance that we would be beaten simply to satisfy a whim and for no apparent reason, whereas the common prisoners had often to suffer such treatment, especially at the hands of some commandants who were eager to assert

their authority and "gave it to be understood" whenever the occasion presented itself. We learned that when the commandant heard of the incident of old Zh-sky's beating, he was highly indignant with the major and impressed upon him that in the future he should graciously keep his hands to himself. So everybody said. We even learned that the Governor General who had trusted and even liked our major as an executive of some ability had reprimanded him too, all of which was not lost on the major. Much as he longed to get at M-sky because of A-v's slander, he could never find a pretext. The entire town soon knew the story of Zh-sky and feeling ran generally against the major. Many people reproached him and some even very harshly so.

I recall my first meeting with the major. We, that is another gentleman convict and myself, who had come to the prison together, had heard frightening stories while still in Tobolsk, of the abominable character of our future chief. The exiles, noblemen who had served twenty-five years, received us with great sympathy and kept in touch with us as long as we stayed in the local prison. They warned us of our future prison chief and promised to do all they could through the people they knew to protect us from his persecution. The Governor General's three daughters who had come from Russia to visit their father did indeed receive letters from them and probably spoke on our behalf. But what was there for the Governor General to do? He simply told the major to treat us a little more carefully. My companion and I arrived soon after two in the afternoon and our guards took us directly to our new ruler. We stood waiting for him in the passage. The sergeants had been sent for and soon appeared accompanied by the major himself. His purple, blotched ill-natured face depressed us from the outset. He reminded one somehow of a spider about to devour the fly caught in its web.

"What's your name?" he asked my companion. He spoke rapidly, harshly and abruptly, evidently to impress us.

"So-and-so."

"And yours?" He stared at me through his spectacles. I told him my name.

"Sergeant! Take them to the prison. See that their heads are shaved in the civil section way! Their irons should be changed tomorrow. Where did you get those coats you're wearing?" he snapped, eyeing the long grey overcoats with the yellow circles on the back, the coats issued to us in Tobolsk and in which we had now appeared in his illustrious presence. "Must be a new uniform! I suppose they're planning to introduce it from St. Petersburg," he said making us turn round. "Have they anything else with them?" he asked the gendarme who had escorted us.

"They have their own clothes, your Honour," answered the escort startled to attention. Everybody knew the major and feared him.

"Take their clothes away. Let them keep only their white underclothes. If they have coloured underclothes, take them too. Put it all on auction and fill out a receipt. A prisoner has no property," he went on looking at us sternly. "See that you behave. Don't let me hear of you or there will be cor-po-ral punishment. Rods for the smallest lapse!"

I was almost ill all that evening after this reception. The effect was heightened by what I saw in the prison, but I have spoken of that before.

I have just now said that they dared not show us any indulgence or allow us any relief in our work. Once, however, they actually tried to do so: for three months B. and I were allowed to work in the engineering department as clerks. This, however, had been brought about by the Engineers' Office in strict secrecy—that is,

everyone who had to know about it actually did know, but pretended that he did not. This took place while Commandant G-v was still in charge. Lieutenant-Colonel G-v, who was indeed a gift from heaven, remained with us for a very short time, not more than six months or perhaps even less, and returned to Russia, leaving behind a lasting memory. Not only did the convicts like him, they very nearly adored him. How he did it I do not know, but he won them over from the start. "He's a father to us! He's better than a father," the convicts kept saying while he was in charge of the Engineers' Office. He was very much the *roué*, I believe. He was not tall and had a rakish self-confident look about him. On the other hand, he was kind to the convicts almost to the point of tenderness and really loved them like a father. Just why he was so fond of them I cannot say, but he could not meet a single convict without saying a cheerful friendly word to him, or exchanging a joke and a smile, and what was most important there was nothing condescending in his attitude, nothing of the official's affability. He was their friend and one of their own in the truest sense of the word. In spite of his genuine democratism, the convicts never once showed him the slightest familiarity or disrespect. On the contrary, a prisoner's face would light up when he met the commander. He would snatch off his cap and break into a smile even before spoken to. And if spoken to, he felt that it was a special boon. Such astonishingly popular men actually do exist. He was a dashing sort of a figure with an upright, energetic bearing. "He's an eagle of a man," the prisoners would say. There was little he could do to relieve their misery though. He was in charge only of the Engineers' Office which ran in its old accustomed groove long established by his predecessors. The most he could do was to allow the working party to go home before the drum beat if he chanced to meet



them anywhere and find that the work was finished. The thing that actually won him general affection was that there was no petty fault-finding, irritability, and the more offensive forms of authority about him. If he had lost a thousand rubles among us I am sure that the most hardened thief would have returned the money to him. I am quite certain of it. And how deeply concerned our prisoners were when they heard that our "eagle" had quarrelled with the hated major. This happened in the first month of the latter's arrival. The two had once served together and so they met as old friends and went on a spree befitting the occasion. But suddenly there was a violent break and they became deadly enemies. We even heard that they came to blows, something not at all impossible with our major. The prisoners were overjoyed when they heard of this. "How could such a man get along with Eight-Eyes! He's an eagle and the major is a—" The word was usually unsuitable for print. They were terribly curious to know which had won the fight. If the rumour of the quarrel had proved false, which it probably was, our prisoners would have been disappointed indeed. "Our commander has won, of course," they would say. "He's a little man, but a spunky one and they say that the major had to hide away under the bed from him." But G-v soon left and the prisoners were in despair. It is true that all our Engineer commanders of whom three or four came and went in my time were all good men. "We shall never get another like him," the convicts would say. "He was an eagle, an eagle and a protector!" G-v was especially well disposed to the noblemen and it was he who finally arranged for B. and myself to work in his office. Our position there was put on a more regular footing after his departure, as there were men among the engineers (one of them in particular) who sympathized with us. And so we continued to go there, copying papers, and even

our handwriting began to improve, when quite suddenly there came an order from the highest authorities to the effect that we must be returned to our regulation labour at once. Someone had played the informer. This had a good side, however, because the office work had begun to bore us dismally. After this, for almost two years, B. and I were sent mostly to the workshops. We used to talk to one another a great deal about our hopes and beliefs. He was a good man, though his convictions were both strange and extreme. It often happens that certain highly intelligent men develop quite paradoxical notions for which they have suffered so much and paid so dearly that they find it very painful and indeed impossible to relinquish them. B. was highly sensitive to any objection that I made and often answered caustically. Perhaps he was more in the right than I in many things, but we finally drifted apart and it was a great grief to me because we had shared so much.

As the years passed M-sky seemed to grow more and more gloomy and depressed. His melancholy was gradually consuming him. Earlier, at the beginning of my term, he was more communicative and his feelings broke through more often and more frankly. He had been in prison for more than two years when I arrived. At first he was much interested in the events of those two years, events of which he could have learned nothing while in prison. He listened to what I told him with great agitation. But as time went on, everything seemed to sink far within him: the embers acquired a layer of ash, and his resentment grew deeper and deeper. "*Je haïs ces brigands*," he would often tell me, regarding the convicts with loathing. I had learned to know them better by then, but could not make him change his mind. He did not seem to hear what I was saying. Sometimes he would absent-mindedly agree only to repeat on the next day: "*Je haïs ces brigands!*" A curious detail: M-sky and I

spoke French to one another, and Dranishnikov, one of the Engineer privates in charge of the work, called us "doctors" for some obscure reason. M-sky grew really animated only when he remembered his mother. "She's old and ill," he told me. "She loves me more than anything in the world and here I am, not knowing even whether she's alive or not. She suffered enough when she learned that I had to run the gauntlet." M-sky was not a nobleman and had not been exempt from corporal punishment. Whenever he thought about it, he would clench his teeth and look away. Towards the end he began to walk about alone more and more frequently. One morning, soon after eleven, he was summoned by the commandant who came out to meet him with a cheerful smile.

"Well, M-sky, tell me what you dreamt of last night."

"His words startled me," he told us afterwards. "It was just as though he had stabbed me!"

"I dreamt that I had a letter from my mother," he answered.

"Better still," replied the commandant. "You're free! Your mother put in a petition for you and it's been granted. Here's a letter from her and here's the order about you. You may leave the prison at once."

He returned to us pale and stunned. We congratulated him and he pressed our hands between his cold and trembling palms. Many of the other convicts also congratulated him, rejoicing over his good fortune.

He was released as a settler and stayed in our town, soon finding a suitable position. At first he often came to the prison and would tell us the news when he could. It was political news that interested him for the most part.

Besides these four, that is M-sky, T-vsky, B., and Zh-sky, there were two who were still very young and serving short sentences. They had little education, but

were good straightforward men. The third, A-chukovsky, was too simple for my liking, a nondescript individual. But the fourth, B-m, an elderly man, impressed all of us most unfavourably. I can't understand how he came to be bracketed with the other gentlemen and he indeed denied that he had anything to do with them. He was a coarse philistine with the manners of a grocer grown rich through petty cheating. He was quite ignorant and cared for nothing but his trade. He was a house-painter, though far above the common run. He was the house-painter of house-painters. The authorities soon learned of his ability and the entire town invited B-m to paint their walls and ceilings. In two years he painted nearly all the official apartments. He was paid for his work by the owners and was thus not badly off. The best aspect of this was that some of his fellow convicts were sent to work with him as his apprentices, and of the three, who accompanied him regularly, two learned the trade quite well and one indeed began to paint as well as he. Our major who also occupied a government house had ordered B-m to paint his walls and ceilings too. And B-m really outdid himself here, doing a better job than he had done even for the Governor. It was a ramshackle one-storey house extremely dilapidated outside. Its interior, however, was now painted magnificently and the major was delighted. He kept rubbing his hands and saying that now he simply had to get married. It would be sinful not to with such a place to live in, he would add very seriously. He grew more and more pleased with B-m and, indirectly, with his apprentices. The job had lasted a whole month, a period in which the major quite changed his mind about the political convicts and began to patronize them. Things came to such a pass that once he suddenly summoned Zh-sky.

"Zh-sky," he said, "I insulted you once. I know that I

had you flogged for nothing and I am sorry. Do you understand? It is *I, I* who am sorry!"

Zh-sky answered that he understood.

"But do you understand that it is *I, I*, your chief who has sent for you to beg your pardon? Can you appreciate what it means? What are you compared with me? A worm! Less than a worm: a convict! And I am a major by the grace of God! Are you capable of understanding such a thing?"

Zh-sky said that he was.

"And so I'm making my peace with you. But do you feel it? Do you feel it fully? Do you appreciate it to the full? Can you possibly understand this, can you feel it? Just think of it: *I, I*, a major..." and so on.

Zh-sky himself described the scene to me. And so there seemed to be some trace of humanity in this quarrelsome, drunken, and disorderly man. Considering his mentality and education, this action could be considered almost generous. It might have been partly due to his inebriate state, of course.

His dream did not come true. He did not marry, though he had quite made up his mind to do so when the painting of his apartment was finished. Instead, he was brought to trial with the result that he was ordered to resign. Many of his old sins were raked up as well: he had once been mayor of the town. The blow came to him unexpectedly. The convicts' rejoicing over the news knew no bounds. It was like a real festival to them. The major, it was said, had wept like an old woman, but there was nothing he could do. He handed in his papers, sold his pair of greys, his estate went next, and ultimately he was reduced to comparative poverty. We used to meet him afterwards in a shabby civilian frock-coat and a cockaded cap. He would still scowl at us, but the spell he had cast was broken the moment he had taken off his uniform. He had been like God's thunder in his uniform. In his

frock-coat he was nothing and looked rather like a lackey. It is surprising what a uniform can do to such a man.

## IX

### THE ESCAPE

Great changes took place soon after the major's departure. The hard labour section was abolished and a penal battalion formed instead. It was under the jurisdiction of the war ministry and much resembled the penal battalions in Russia. This meant that the convicts of the second section were no longer brought to our prison. Their place was taken by military prisoners, that is, by people who were not deprived of their civil rights, but were ordinary soldiers sentenced to short terms up to six years at the most. When they left the prison, they returned to their battalions and continued in service. Those of them who came back for a second offence got sentences of twenty years as of old. True, we had had a military section in the prison before, but this was only because there was no other place to put this category. Now, however, the entire prison belonged to the military section. It goes without saying that the convicts who had belonged to the civil section, deprived of all rights, branded, with half their heads shaved, remained in the prison until the expiration of their terms. No new convicts of this category arrived any more and those who remained gradually completed their sentences and went their ways, so that in ten years not one would be left. The special division, too, was left intact and the worst of the military offenders were sent there as formerly, pending the launching of the heaviest of the hard-labour projects. And so life continued almost unchanged: there were the same conditions, the same work, and almost the same

regulations. Only the officials had changed and become more numerous. There was a new post, that of the company commander. It was filled by a staff officer. In addition, there were four deputy officers who took turn on duty at the prison. The old invalids were gone; twelve sergeants and a quartermaster sergeant took their place. The convicts were grouped in tens with a monitor chosen from among them at the head of each. This was a mere formality of course. As might have been expected, Akim Akimovich was at once chosen monitor. The entire system, with all its new officials and convicts, continued to be ruled by the commandant. And that was all the change there was. The prisoners were excited at first, argued, conjectured and tried to gauge their new masters. But when they saw that fundamentally everything had remained as it was they instantly calmed down and life went on as before. The main thing was that we were rid of the major. Everybody sighed with relief and took heart. The convicts lost their cowed look. Everyone knew that he could explain himself to the authorities if need be and that only by some rare error the innocent might be punished instead of the guilty. Even vodka was sold as before, and in the same manner, though there were sergeants now in place of the old invalids. They proved, for the most part, to be reasonable and shrewd men who understood their position. Some of them, though, were inclined to bully the convicts at first. From sheer inexperience, they thought that they could treat the convicts like soldiers, but soon even they realized how things stood. Those who were too dull to realize this quickly enough were soon taught the essence of the matter by the convicts. There were several clashes: the convicts would tempt a sergeant into drinking and then tell him that he had drunk with them and so— Finally, all the sergeants came to look calmly on or rather tried not to look at all, when the casings filled with vodka were car-

ried through and sold. Moreover, they would go to the market like the invalids of old and bring the prisoners white bread, beef and other things which caused them no loss of dignity. Why the changes were introduced I do not know. They occurred in my last years in prison and I was destined to live under the new conditions two years more.

Shall I describe my life year by year? That is hardly necessary. If I were to set down in sequence everything that happened to me in that period I would have added at least three times as many chapters as there are and this would grow monotonous in the end. The colour would be too uniform, especially if the reader has by now gained a sufficient knowledge of our civil section. I had meant to present a complete and vivid picture of our prison and all the years I spent there. Have I or have I not achieved this? It is not for me to judge in any case. And so I might as well end the story here. Besides, sometimes I grow sick at heart from these memories. And I cannot remember everything, no matter how I try. My memories of later years have faded somewhat, and I am sure that I have completely forgotten many things. I only remember that one year, which was so like the other, dragged on sluggishly and bleakly. I remember that the long days were as monotonous as water dripping from the roof. And I also remember that only my longing for resurrection gave me the strength to hope and wait. Finally, I found the strength of resignation: I waited, counting the days, and though a thousand of them yet remained, it was with real delight that I ticked them off and saw them buried in the past. And when the new day dawned, I rejoiced at the thought that now there were not a thousand left, but only nine hundred and ninety-nine. I was alone, though I had hundreds of companions, and came to love my solitude at last. In my mental solitude, I reviewed every detail of my life, sternly judged



my actions and even blessed my fate at some moments for having sent me such solitude, but for which I would have achieved neither self-judgement nor the stern scrutiny of my past existence. And what hopes filled my heart then! I reflected, resolved, I swore to myself that the mistakes and lapses of the past would never again occur. I mapped out a course for the future and decided to follow it faithfully. A blind faith was born in me that I could and would fulfil it all. How I longed for freedom and cried for it to come quickly. I wanted to try my strength in a new struggle. I was seized with feverish impatience at times. But it is painful for me now to recall my frame of mind in those years. All this, after all, concerns no one but myself and if I have set it down, it is because I feel that everybody will understand it, since anyone would be sure to have the same experience if sent to prison in the prime of life.

But enough of that. I had better relate a little more to avoid ending so abruptly.

It has just occurred to me that someone might ask whether it was possible at all for anyone to escape and if anyone ever did? I have already said that when a prisoner has served two or three years of his sentence, he comes to value the time behind him and feels that it might be better to serve the rest of his term and go out into the settlement without running any risks. This train of thought, however, is characteristic only of those prisoners who have reasonably short terms. The long-term convict might decide to take the risk. In our prison, however, it was not done. I cannot say for sure whether this was due to cowardice, the strict military guard, the vast unpeopled steppes surrounding us or anything else. All of these reasons counted. It was indeed a hard thing to escape from our prison. Still, there was an instance of it in my time. Two of our convicts tried it, the most important of our criminals.

When the major had been disposed, A-v (who had been his informer) found himself alone and unprotected. He was a young man, but his character was growing stronger with the years. He had come to be a resolute, reckless and far from stupid individual. He would have gone on informing and improving his living by various underhand methods if he had received his freedom, but would surely not have been caught as stupidly as he was before. He had also tried his hand at producing fake passports. I am not quite sure about this, but have heard it said by the others. They told me that he was engaged with this when he was still able to visit the major's kitchen. Needless to say, he made what profit he could out of this occupation. In short, he was capable of anything to change his lot. I had occasion to learn something of his mind and heart. His cynicism often reached the extreme of shocking impudence and coldest mockery and aroused my loathing. I think that if he had but wanted a dram of vodka very much and could get it only by cutting someone's throat he would certainly have done so, provided that he could have done it in secret. Prudence had come to him in prison. It was this man whom the convict Kulikov of the special section singled out for his purpose.

I have mentioned Kulikov before. He was not young, but full of passion, vitality, and strength, a man of many capabilities. There was plenty of energy in him and he wanted to live. He was of the sort who desire to live even in extreme old age. And if I had ever wondered why no one tried to run away, Kulikov would have aroused my wonder most of all. But finally he did make up his mind. Which of them influenced the other more, A-v or Kulikov, I can hardly say. The two suited each other well for that purpose. They grew intimate. I think that Kulikov counted on A-v to prepare passports for them. A-v was a nobleman, a man of good society, which gave promise

of some attractive adventures if they could only reach Russia. Who knows how they had been drawn together and what hopes they had had: it was certain that their hopes were aimed higher than at usual Siberian vagabondage. Kulikov was a born actor capable of playing many and various parts in life. He could hope for much, or at least for variety. Prison was bound to grow unendurable to such a man. At last, they plotted to escape.

This was impossible, however, without the assistance of a guard. They had to persuade one of the guards to join them. There was a Pole in one of the companies, an energetic man who perhaps deserved a better lot. He was no longer young, but brave and earnest. Soon after he came to Siberia as a soldier, he had deserted in the hope of returning to his native land. He was caught, however, punished and kept in a penal battalion for two years. When he was sent back to his regular unit, he seemed to have changed and began to serve with zeal and energy and was soon promoted to corporal. He was ambitious, self-reliant and aware of his own worth. Yes indeed, he looked and spoke like a man who knew what he was worth. I saw him several times when he escorted us as a guard. The Poles too told me something about him. It appeared that his former homesickness had grown into a steady, dumb and well-concealed hatred. He was a man capable of anything and Kulikov was not mistaken in his choice. His name was Koller. They came to an agreement and fixed the day; they were to make the attempt on a sultry day in June. The summer in our parts was fairly steady and a tramp could desire nothing better. They could not, of course, simply walk out of the fortress, since the town stood on a bare hillside; there were no woods for a considerable distance around. They had to change into civilian clothes and to do this had first to reach the outskirts of the town where Kulikov's den was located. Whether his friends there had been let

into the secret, it is hard to say. Most probably they had, though it was denied at the trial. A certain comely young woman nicknamed Vanka-Tanka began her career that year. She was a wench of promise which she later partly fulfilled. Another of her nicknames was Fire. She too must have had a hand in the affair. Kulikov had been spending a good deal of money on her for a year.

Our two heroes went into the yard during the morning roll-call and contrived to be sent with convict Shilkin, a stove-maker and plasterer, to plaster the military barracks which the soldiers had quit some time before for summer quarters. A-v and Kulikov were to be his help-mates. Koller turned up as one of the guards and since two guards were required for three prisoners, he, as senior and corporal, was entrusted with a young recruit whom he could edify in the arts of his duties. Our fugitives must have greatly influenced Koller if, after his long and of late successful service, he, an intelligent, sedate and prudent man, had resolved to throw in his lot with theirs.

They reached the barracks at six o'clock in the morning. There was no one around but themselves. When they had been at work for about an hour, Kulikov and A-v told Shilkin that they were going to the workshop to see some man they knew and pick up some tools they needed. Shilkin had to be handled with great caution. He was a typical Moscow stove-maker: shrewd, sly, and chary of words. A puny man, he should have been walking about in his waistcoat, Moscow fashion, but fate had decreed otherwise and after long wanderings, he found himself in our special section sentenced for life in the category of our most desperate military criminals. How he had managed to accomplish this is more than I can say. I never noticed any trace of dissatisfaction in him. He was always peaceable, though sometimes he got as drunk as a lord, behaving moderately however even then. He was

not in the know, but his eyes were sharp enough. Kulikov, needless to say, winked to him to indicate that they were going after the vodka which had been stowed away in the workshop the day before. This was not lost on Shilkin, of course, and he let them go without suspicion, staying behind with the young recruit, while the three including Koller set off for the suburbs.

A half-hour went by, but they did not return and this gave Shilkin food for thought. He had seen a good deal in his day. He remembered that Kulikov had seemed in a peculiar mood and that A-v had seemed to whisper to him once or twice and Kulikov had winked at him. Then too, Koller had instructed the young recruit what to do while he was gone. This had somehow seemed unnatural for such a man as Koller. In short, the more Shilkin remembered, the more suspicious he grew. His uneasiness grew when he saw that they did not return. He realized, of course, that he too was running a risk, since suspicion would most certainly fall on him as well. They might believe that he had had a hand in the matter and had deliberately allowed them to get away. The longer he delayed reporting the disappearance of Kulikov and A-v, the stronger this suspicion would be. There was no time to be lost. He suddenly remembered also that Kulikov and A-v had been unusually friendly of late, whispering together or walking behind the barracks. He had often wondered what they could be talking about. He looked searchingly at his guard who stood yawning over his rifle and innocently picking his nose. Without troubling to tell his suspicions to the soldier, Shilkin merely asked him to follow him to the workshop where he made inquiries, but found that no one had seen the three. Shilkin's suspicion was a certainty. If they had simply gone off to the suburbs for a drink and enjoyment, as Kulikov sometimes did, he would have told him about it, since such a thing was hardly worth concealing. Without

returning to the barracks, Shilkin made straight for the prison.

It was nine o'clock when he presented himself before the sergeant on duty and told him his supposition. The latter was terrified, refusing to believe what he was told. Shilkin expressed nothing but a vague suspicion. The sergeant rushed to the major and the latter to the commandant. In a quarter of an hour all necessary measures had been taken and the Governor General himself informed. These were important criminals and the chiefs therefore might anticipate endless trouble from St. Petersburg. Rightly or wrongly, A-v was regarded as a political prisoner, and Kulikov belonged to the special section, that is, he was an arch criminal and a military offender into the bargain. No one had ever escaped from the special section before. It was remembered, incidentally, that every prisoner of the special section was to have two guards or at least one over him while at work. The rule had been neglected. In short, it was an unpleasant affair all round. Messengers were sent to all the villages and small towns with the descriptions of the fugitives. Mounted Cossacks were dispatched to overtake them and letters were addressed to the neighbouring provinces. In short, everyone was shaking in his boots.

Meanwhile, the convicts were seized with an agitation of quite a different kind. The prisoners learned the news as they returned from work and everyone received it with hidden glee, every heart bounded joyfully. The event not only broke the monotony, but stirred the prison like an ant-heap. It awoke response in every man and touched some long-forgotten chords. Something like hope, daring and the dream of freedom crept into every heart. "There are some who escape, then why not we?" Everyone took heart and there was a challenge in every eye. The convicts at any rate seemed suddenly very proud and regarded the sergeant with something like condescension.

As was only natural, the authorities swooped down on the prison in force, the commandant included. Our men looked brave, impressively silent and stolid. "We can do a piece of good work when we want to," they seemed to say. The convicts, of course, had foreseen the raids and had everything securely hidden. They knew that the authorities were always "wiser after the event," and they turned out to be right: there was great ado—they rummaged everywhere, but found nothing. The guards were reinforced when the convicts went to work after dinner. The sentries came to the barracks in the evening several times, the roll was called once more with twice as many mistakes as usual, which involved more excitement and running about. We were sent out into the yard and counted all over again, and once again when we were back in our barracks. In short, there was a great commotion.

For all this the convicts did not care a fig. All wore an extraordinarily independent air and, as usually happens in such cases, behaved with rare propriety that evening. "We won't let them catch us out!" they seemed to say. It worried the authorities that the fugitives may have had some accomplices among the convicts and therefore they ordered the prisoners to be sharply watched and their talk listened to. This, however, only amused the convicts. "What a thing to do—leave accomplices behind them!" "Such things are done where no one can see!" "Kulikov and A-v are not the sort who would leave any clues. It's a neat job. Those two knew what they were about. They could get even through a keyhole." In short, Kulikov's and A-v's fame was growing and everybody was proud of them, feeling that this exploit would be remembered as long as the prison stood.

"They're real clever, they are!" said some.

"They thought nobody could escape from here, and there you are!" added others.

"There you are..." mimicked a third, looking

around with a show of authority. "But who escaped? Not someone like you!"

At any other time, the convict spoken to would have snapped back at once, but now he kept modestly silent. "It's true enough! Kulikov and A-v are not like other men. One must first show what one is like."

"But why do we keep staying here, brothers?" a fourth, who had been sitting quietly by the kitchen window with his cheek on his palm, drawled most languidly.

"What are we doing here anyway? Neither decently alive like the living nor decently dead like the dead!"

"What are you talking about? Prison's not like a shoe! You can't just kick it off."

"But there's Kulikov," interjected a hot-headed newcomer.

"Kulikov," scoffed another, sniffing at the greenhorn. "Kulikov," he repeated.

In other words: there were not many like Kulikov.

"And A-v knows what's what too!"

"Doesn't he though! He can turn even Kulikov round his little finger. He's a sharp one, he is."

"I wonder how far they've got by now."

The talk immediately turned to how far they had got and where to and where they ought to have gone and which volost was nearest. Those who knew the region were heard with rapt attention. The inhabitants of the neighbouring villages were not the right sort, according to the general opinion. They were too near the town and much too sharp. They would not help the fugitives and betray them if they could.

"The peasants here are a vicious lot. Ugh, how vicious!"

"Not very reliable peasants, I must say."

"Those salt-ears! Better not fall into their hands!"

"But ours are not fools either."



"Of course, it's just a matter of who beats whom. Ours are not the kind to be beaten."

"We'll live and see."

"Do you think they'll get caught?"

"I think they never will!" irrupted a hothead banging his fist on the table.

"Hm, that depends."

"I'll tell you what, friends," interjected Skuratov. "If I had run for it, they'd never catch me."

"You?"

Some began to laugh, while others just ignored him. But Skuratov was carried away by his imagination.

"I'd never get caught, never!" he insisted hotly. "I often think about it and just marvel at myself. I'd get through a keyhole if I wanted to and they would never catch me."

"You'd go to a peasant for a piece of bread when you got hungry enough."

Everyone laughed.

"Would I? You lie!"

"What are you wagging your tongue for? Don't we know you came here for killing the cow death\* with Uncle Vaska's help."

The laughter grew, while the graver men looked even more disgusted.

"You're lying!" shouted Skuratov. "It's Nikitka who made up that lie about me—and it wasn't about me either, but Vaska. And I only got dragged into it, I don't know why. I'm from Moscow and have been on the road from the time I was knee-high. When the sexton was teaching me my letters, he used to pull me by the ear and say: 'Oh Lord, lead us not into temptation!' And

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\* In other words, they had killed a peasant woman or man because they had suspected that he or she had cast a spell over the cattle with the wind. We had one such murderer in the prison.  
—*Author's note.*

I used to repeat after him: 'Oh Lord, lead us not to the police-station!' That's what I was like when I was little."

There was more laughter—just what Skuratov wanted. He could not help clowning. But the talk soon reverted to the graver matters, and it was only the older men and the experts who expressed their opinions. The younger and more timid modestly enjoyed their exchange and leaned forward to hear better. Soon, there was a large crowd in the mess barrack. There were no sergeants and the talk was unrestrained. One of the most excited seemed to be Mametka, a little Tatar with high cheek-bones—a very comical figure. He spoke hardly a word of Russian and understood very little. Still he craned his neck and listened with delight.

"Well Mametka, *yakshi*?\*" Skuratov, spurned by the rest, turned to him for want of a better companion.

"*Yakshi*, oh *yakshi*!" jabbered Mametka full of animation and bobbing his comical head. "*Yakshi! Yakshi!*"

"They won't be caught, *yok*?\*\*"

"*Yok, yok!*" Mametka agreed waving his arms.

"Your was lying and my not seeing?"

"Yes, *yakshi*!" Mametka bobbed again.

"*Yakshi* it is!" Skuratov pushed Mametka's cap down over his eyes and went out of the kitchen in the best of spirits, leaving the little Tatar a bit perplexed.

Strictest discipline in the prison and diligent searches in the neighbourhood went on for a week. Just how, I do not know, but the convicts seemed to be closely acquainted with all the manoeuvres beyond the stockade. The news favoured the fugitives in the first few days: there was not a sign of them and the convicts were delighted. All anxiety over the fate of the fugitives was gone. "They

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\* *Yakshi*—Tatar for "good."—*Tr.*

\*\* *Yok*—"no."—*Tr.*

won't find anything or catch anyone," they would say complacently.

"They're gone and that's all there's to it."

"Farewell and go to hell! We won't be back so soon!"

The convicts knew that all the peasants of the neighbourhood had been pressed into the search, and that all suspicious places, forests and ravines were under observation.

"That's nonsense," the prisoners sneered. "They must have had someone to hide with."

"Of course they have," agreed the others. "They're not such fools. They arranged it all beforehand."

There was no end to the conjectures. Some said that the fugitives were still in town, hiding somewhere in a suburban cellar until the "larm" was over and their hair grew long enough. They would lay low for six months or a year, if need be, and then go on.

In short, everybody was in a somewhat romantic frame of mind, when suddenly, about a week after the escape, there came the first rumour that a trace had been found. The rumour, of course, was scornfully rejected. On the same evening, however, it was confirmed and the convicts grew uneasy.

Word came from the town the next morning that the fugitives had been caught and were being brought back. Fresh details came after dinner: they had been captured in some village seventy versts away. Finally, the sergeant on duty returned from the major and definitely announced that the fugitives would be brought back by evening and taken straight to the prison guardroom. There was no room for doubt any longer. It is difficult to describe the effect this had on the prisoners. At first they seemed to fly into a rage, but then grew depressed and later sounded a jeering note. It was not the pursuers whom they were scoffing now, but the recaptured men. Only a few laughed at first, then almost everybody

joined in with the exception of a few stronger and steadier characters, who could think for themselves and could not be disconcerted by the general banter. They regarded the inconstancy of the mob with contempt and said nothing.

In a word, Kulikov and A-v were now run down as ardently as they were formerly extolled, as though they had done everyone an injury. The story was scornfully spread that the prisoners had grown hungry and gone to the village to ask for some bread—an execrable thing to do for a tramp, in the general view. The story was not true. The fugitives had been tracked to a forest where they had hidden and were surrounded. Realizing that they could not escape, they had given themselves up. There was nothing else that they could do.

When they were brought in just before dark, bound hand and foot and guarded by the gendarmes, the whole prison clung to the stockade to see what would happen to them. They saw nothing, of course, but the carriages of the major and the commandant waiting by the guard-room. The fugitives were kept fettered in a secret cell and were brought to trial the next day. The mockery of the convicts died down when they learned what had happened and realized that there was nothing the men could have done but surrender. Then came the trial which everyone followed with sympathy.

“They’ll run through a thousand each,” said some.

“A thousand, my eye!” said others. “They’ll do them in. A-v may get a thousand, but the other will be finished off because he’s in the special section.”

Their guess was wrong, however. A-v was sentenced only to five hundred strokes; his former good behaviour and the fact that this was his first offence were taken into account. Kulikov received fifteen hundred if I remember right. The punishment, too, was inflicted rather mercifully. Sensible men that they were, they had

not involved anyone else when on trial and had told a clear and precise story. They said that they had fled straight from the prison without stopping anywhere. I was most sorry for Koller: he lost his last hopes, received two thousand strokes, I think, more than the others, and was sent off to convict labour somewhere.

A-v's punishment was the most lenient partly thanks to the doctors. In the hospital, however, he blustered noisily, swearing that he was ready for anything now and would do something quite different next time. Kulikov bore himself as usual, that is, with stolid decorum. And when he returned to the prison after his punishment, he looked as if he had never been away. The convicts' attitude had changed, however: though Kulikov knew how to stand on his dignity under all circumstances, they seemed to have lost much of their respect for him and began to treat him in a more offhand manner. In short, Kulikov's glory was sadly tarnished after that escape. Success means so much to people.

## X

### RELEASE

All that I have just described took place in my last year of hard labour. This last year and especially the last months are almost as clear in my memory as the first. There is no need to mention little things. I recall only that in spite of all my impatience, I found life easier that year than during all the preceding years of my term. In the first place, I had many friends and well-wishers among the convicts now who had finally concluded that I was not a bad sort. Many of them were devoted to me and really fond of me. The sapper was nearly in tears when he saw my companion and me to the prison gate. For a month after our release we lived in a government

building in the town and he kept calling on us whenever possible. There were others, however, who were grim and unfriendly to the end and who, God knows why, seemed to find it very burdensome to exchange a word with me. There had always been a barrier between us.

Towards the end, I had more privileges than ever before in prison. There were some acquaintances and even former schoolmates of mine among the officers of the town and I renewed my connections with them. Thanks to them, I was able to get hold of more money, to write home, and even to get books. For years I had not read a single book and it is difficult to convey the strange and disturbing effect produced on me by the first book I read in prison. I remember that I began reading in the evening after the barracks had been locked and kept on until daybreak. It was a stray magazine that had fallen into my hands. It was like news from another world. My former existence rose before me in all its brightness and I tried to guess from the lines before me whether I had fallen far behind that world, whether much had happened in the interim, and what questions were now troubling the minds of men. I weighed every word, tried to read between the lines, tried to find some hidden meaning in allusions to the past. I tried to find the traces of what had agitated us in our day, and how sad I felt as I realized what a stranger I had become to the new life; I was so utterly adrift. I would have to get used to things as they now were and get to know new people. I read with particular eagerness an article signed by a familiar name, but there were new names as well, and I was impatient to get to know them and fretted because I could get at so few books and they were so difficult to acquire. Under the old major, indeed, it had been dangerous to bring books into the prison at all. In the event of a search, there would surely be questions:

"Where had the books come from? Where did you get them? So you have connections with someone?" Living without books, therefore, I had withdrawn into myself, had set myself problems trying to solve them and sometimes tormenting myself with them. It is impossible to convey all this in words.

I had entered the prison in winter and was therefore to be set free in the same season, on the same day of the month as I had arrived. I waited for the winter with impatience, watching with joy the leaves wither on the trees and the grass fade in the steppes. But now the summer was gone and the autumn winds had begun to howl. The first snow-flakes drifted down hesitantly. And at last the long-awaited winter arrived. My heart would beat heavily at times with anticipation of freedom. But strange to say, the nearer the time came, the more patient I grew. I was even surprised by this in the last few days and even reproached myself: why was I so indifferent and cool about it? Many convicts whom I met in the yard during our leisure time were eager to congratulate me.

"So now, Alexander Petrovich, my good sir, you'll be free soon, very very soon! And you will leave us, poor folk, all alone."

"But it's not so long for you, Martynov, is it?" I would answer.

"For me? Oh no. I've got seven years more to drag through!"

He would sigh and stand still with a vacant look, as though gazing into the future. Yes, there were many who congratulated me with sincere sympathy. It even seemed to me that they had all grown more friendly. They felt that I was not one of them any longer. K-sky, a Polish nobleman, a quiet and kind young man, was also fond of pacing the yard in our leisure time. He wanted to preserve his health by fresh air and exercise and thus

compensate himself for all the harm done by the stuffy nights in the barracks.

"I'm impatient for you to leave," he said to me once with a smile. "When you leave, *I shall know* that I have exactly a year to go."

I shall mention in passing that freedom somehow seemed far freer to us than real freedom owing to our seclusion and day-dreaming. The convicts exaggerated the idea of actual freedom, which is typical of every prisoner. Some ragged orderly seemed like something of a king to us, the ideal of the free man compared with the convict, because he could go about with unshaved head free of fetters or guards.

I walked round the prison stockade for the last time on the eve of my release. How many thousands of times had I walked this round in all the years? It was there behind the barracks that I had paced the yard, alone and dejected, in my first years. I remembered how I had then calculated the thousands of days that remained to freedom. Good Lord, how long ago that seemed. And over there, in that other corner we had had an eagle. There, too, Petrov often came up to speak to me. Even recently he had often come running up to walk silently at my side as though guessing my thoughts and wondering about something. I took leave of the black, rough-hewn logs of the barracks. How unfriendly they had seemed *then*. They must have grown older since, but I could see no sign of this. How much youth had gone to waste within these walls. What energies had perished unused, for if the whole truth must be told, these men who were here were no ordinary men. Perhaps they were indeed the most highly gifted and the strongest of our people. But this mighty force had been lost—uselessly, unnaturally, irrevocably; and who was to blame?

That is just it: who is to blame?



Before work the next morning, when day was just breaking, I made the rounds of the barracks to say good-bye to all the convicts. Many rough hands were extended to me. Some shook mine like real friends, though only a few. Others very well knew that I was going to become a man entirely different from them; they knew I had friends in the town and that I would go directly to the gentlemen and take a place among them as their equal. They knew it and though their farewell was pleasant and kindly enough, their words were not spoken to a friend but to a gentleman. Some turned away in a surly manner and a few even regarded me with something like hatred.

Everyone went off to work with the drum beat, while I stayed behind. Sushilov had been almost the first to get up that morning and had worked hard to get the tea ready for me on time. Poor Sushilov! How he cried when I gave him my old clothes, my shirts, my under-fetters and what money I had.

"It's not that," he said, "it's not that." He controlled his lips only with an effort. "How can I bear losing you, Alexander Petrovich. What shall I do without you?"

I took leave of Akim Akimovich.

"It will soon be your turn," I said to him.

"I shall yet have to stay, I shall have to stay for a long time," he murmured pressing my hand. I threw my arms around him.

Some ten minutes after the prisoners had gone to work, we left the prison for the last time, I and my companion, the man who had arrived here with me. We had to go to the smithy to have our fetters struck off, but there was no armed guard with us, only a sergeant. It was our own convicts who struck off our fetters in the smithy. I went to the anvil after my companion had been freed of his chains. Turning around, I put my foot

on it. The smiths fussed over the chains trying to lay them out as best they could.

“Mind the rivet! Turn the rivet first!” said the elder of the two. “Put it down. That’s right. Now strike away!”

The fetters clattered to the floor. I picked them up to have a last look at them. How strange it was to think that they had been on my ankles a moment before.

“Well, God be with you, God be with you!” said the convicts in a gruff yet somehow pleased tone.

Yes, God be with us. There would be freedom, a new life, resurrection. Ah, that glorious moment!